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R B HANSFORD
KANSAS CITY KANSAS

"Bill," said Sandy, "Circle-Dot are the purtiest, bravest and best gal in Texas." (Page 24.)

CIRCLE-DOT

A True Story of Cowboy Life
Forty Years Ago

BY

ilford
M. H. DONOHO

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PREFACE.

THE AUTHOR was a cowboy, during the period of which he writes, and is thoroughly conversant with every phase of cowboy life. After the lapse of many years, some of the most pleasant recollections engraved on the tablets of his memory are of the open plains, the wild cattle, and the irresistible cowboy.

To travel over the ground where these cattle once grazed in countless numbers and see the domestic kine now driven to the pastures by little children; to see the broad prairies, where formerly a ride of a thousand miles would not reveal a furrow or fence, now checkered over with posts and wires and plowed fields, and the landscape dotted here and there with stacks of wheat, ricks of hay, and farm-houses, makes the old cowboy long to again see the prairies covered with long-horned cattle, picturesque wild horses, and herds of innumerable buffaloes; to once more ride the bucking broncho in pursuit of the wild steer and the fighting maverick; to hear the coyote's howl and the stampede's roar; to inhale the aroma of wild flowers whilst breathing the life-giving air that blows across the free and untrammeled plains, where the sun rises and sets in a halo of glory, where you have that thrilling of the heart, that buoyancy of spirit, that drives away every care and makes you laugh at danger.

To portray this wild, active and strenuous life, and to give an accurate pen-picture of this past and forgotten industry, is the mission of CIRCLE-DOT.

M. H. DONOHO.

KANSAS CITY, November 1, 1907.

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COWBOY LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

CIRCLE-DOT.

In 1849, when the gold-fields of California were attracting the attention of the civilized world and the prairies and plains were dotted with teams of oxen and covered wagons loaded with men bound for the Pacific Coast, John Williams left his home on the bank of the Cumberland river and joined a party of emigrants whose avowed destination was the land of gold; but after crossing the Mississippi river some of them became dissatisfied and the party disbanded, leaving Williams stranded in Missouri without the ability to go forward or to return, and finally he drifted toward the south, and in the spring of 1850 landed in Texas.

He erected a house on the Brazos river in that State when the nearest settlement was more than fifty miles distant, and in a very modest way, with but a few ponies and a small number of cattle, began to build up a stock ranch. Year by year he added improvements to this place, building stockades, corrals and branding-pens, until it was gradually transformed into a substantial stock farm. The conditions for stock-growing were so favorable and his herds were so prolific that in a short time he found wealth flowing to him in excess of his brightest anticipations, and he was enabled thereby to establish one of the most extensive and successful cattle ranches in Texas.

During the dark days of the Civil War, peaceable citizens both North and South were called upon to forsake their fields, herds and families to assist in this great struggle, by serving in the army. John Williams was a Tennesseean, a true and loyal son of the South, and feeling the martial spirit burning in his breast, he speedily responded to the call to arms, and leaving his prosperous ranch and his numerous herds, his wife and only child, he offered his service to the Confederate Government, was accepted, and assigned to a Texas regiment. For two long years the waiting ones at home heard from him often, always in active service and always at the front. Then came the sad news of his death, for he had fallen at Vicksburg while leading his men in a desperate charge. During all of the time the owner had been absent serving in the army his ranch and herds had been forsaken, for the demand for men to go into the army was so urgent that no one could be employed to look after the interests of the ranch; hence everything had been neglected, the fences of the corrals and branding-pens were down, the herds strayed over the surrounding country, many of them were stolen by the ever-active cattle-thieves, some were lost, and the ranch was rapidly running down and becoming of little value.

When Mrs. Williams received word of her husband's death, she immediately sought to sell all of the "mark and brand" of her ranch, for, being unable to procure assistance to care for the cattle, she felt that unless they could be disposed of, all would be lost to her. But the war had paralysed many of the civil industries in Texas, and the stock business was one of the first to feel the stroke, and at this time there was no available market for cattle or ponies, and hence no purchaser could be found; and although the owner of several thousand head of cattle, she found it difficult to make sales sufficient to supply the necessaries of life. Here was a dilemma from which it seemed impossible to escape, for she could not find a solution of this difficult matter that promised the slightest relief. At this critical time, when their property was rapidly being lost and poverty and privation confronting them, Edna, the daughter, proposed to take charge of the ranch, and herself do the work necessary to protect and maintain it. This was a hard proposition for the mother to sanction, as she had never heard of a girl doing such work, and hardly believed it possible for her daughter to succeed. This was an exigency, however, which must be met at once; she therefore consented to the request, and Edna was duly installed as General Manager of the ranch.

At the time of her father's death Edna was fourteen years of age, and all of her short life had been spent with her ponies and cattle; they were her only companions and her only friends. When her father was at home she took great delight in accompanying him each day when he was riding out looking after the welfare of his herds, and by this constant out-of-doors exercise she grew strong and vigorous in body and mind, and also acquired a knowledge of the business which afterwards proved most valuable to her. She was an accomplished equestrienne, and the most experienced cowboy could not more closely follow the motions of his horse or sit in the saddle with greater ease and security than could this young girl, and the wildest broncho would become mild and gentle under her magical touch. She was an expert with the rifle and revolver, and her well-known ability to protect herself and property soon inspired respect from all classes of people, while her genial, vivacious temperment and kind disposition made every cowboy in the country her friend.

To bring the wandering cattle back to their range, to establish their identity by marking and branding them, to build corrals, stockades and fences, to repair the waste that several years of abandonment had wrought,—in short, to bring order out of chaos, required a cool, calculating mind, a brave heart and untiring energy; but where many experienced stockmen may have failed, Edna, by her success, demonstrated that she was equal to the emergency. She had accepted the position which she held as general manager of the ranch as a duty from which there was no escape, and with a zeal and energy rarely equaled and perhaps never excelled, with such help as she could get from the neighboring ranchmen and cowboys, she began the arduous work of reorganizing the ranch, and in this work she developed such rare tact and systematic business sagacity that her less energetic competitors were amazed at her success.

Prior to the Civil War, and for many years subsequent thereto, Texas was the great grazing-field of the United States. Upon the broad prairies of that vast region known as central and western Texas, immense numbers of horses and cattle were raised, and from there driven to the nearest and most convenient markets. The rich mesquite-grass, which grew luxuriantly all over those plains, was so succulent and nutritious that these animals could feed all of the year on it, coming out in the spring, after a hard winter, as sleek and glossy as if stall-fed on the best of corn. This was a natural pasture-land, good alike in winter and in summer. Here horses and cattle were raised and kept until maturity, and then sold upon the market, without the owner ever giving a thought to feed or other care, except to see that the animal bore his mark and brand and that they were gathered up and sold at the proper time. The cattle were of the old Mexican breed, of lighter weight and not so stocky as the improved herds of the north. Their horns were long, sharp-pointed, and rounded into graceful curves. The cattle roamed at will over the wide plains, sometimes wandering many miles from their owner's ranch; they were wild as the deer and could run almost as fast, and it required good horses and experienced men to drive and control them.

The brand that John Williams had adopted for his herds was a large circle with a dot in the center; and from this brand the ranch was known as the Circle-Dot Ranch.

After Edna had restored the ranch to something like its original dimensions, stockmen, who in speaking of the brand of cattle and of the ranch had always called it the Circle-Dot Outfit, without knowing the name of the girl who managed the ranch called her "Circle-Dot," and owing to the large herds under her control she was for many years known throughout the great cattle-markets of the Southwest, and particularly all over the State of Texas, as "Circle-Dot, the cattle queen."

CHAPTER II.

BILL AND SANDY.

On a balmy afternoon in the spring of 1866 a man was riding leisurely over the plains on that vast prairie of Texas, south of the Trinity river. Tall and muscular, apparently about twenty years of age, as straight and lithe as an Indian, his face denoted firmness and will-power, but his demeanor was mild, gentle, and full of good-nature. His ruddy cheeks and fair skin bore witness to the fact that he had not long been exposed to the hot sun and bleaching winds of Texas, for the roses still bloomed on his cheeks and his skin was not tanned by exposure. His direction lay toward the south, and well knowing that he was beyond the western limits of settlements, he took frequent surveys of the surrounding country to see if any prowling bands of hostile Indians were following or watching him on the trail. Suddenly he stopped and gazed intently toward the southwest, where his keen eyes had discovered an object, and a nearer approach disclosed to him a white man who had dismounted and was holding the lariat of his pony while the animal grazed along the margin of a small stream. Glad to meet one of his own race in this wild country, he turned his horse's head directly toward the stranger, and a quick gallop soon brought him within hailing distance. He knew that strangers were not always welcome on the frontier, for the reason that cattle-thieves were constantly committing depredations in that part of the country, and there was some suspicion attached to every unknown man seen riding over the range. But that fact did not deter the rider, for he was seeking adventure and excitement, and felt able to protect himself in any emergency.

"Hello! stranger," he called; "am I intruding upon your domain here?"

"This are a purty big country," responded the other, "an' yeh haint no call t' ask my pehmission t' travel oveh hit."

"I beg your pardon," said the traveler, "but I desire to inquire of you the location of the Three-Bar Ranch."

"Ef I knowd yeh wus square, I could pint yehr pony's nose to'ard the ranch an' maybe travel with yeh, but yeh hev got t' show me befoah we jine company. I'm givin' yeh the straight tip that onless yeh air on the dead square, this are a mighty onsafe community t' travel 'round in, an' yeh hed better be a little leary 'bout goin' oveh to'ard the ranch."

The horseman's face flushed at this rude and apparently unprovoked reply; but he was not seeking a quarrel with this plain-speaking cowboy, and therefore replied in an easy, friendly tone:

"My name is Bill Parker. I am a stranger here, as you can probably see. I just crossed the Red river a few days since, coming south, and I want to reach the Three-Bar Ranch."

Waiting a few seconds for the reply, which did not come, he added with some asperity: "But if anybody in this neighborhood wants to make this dangerous ground, and is prepared to take the consequences of such actions, he has my permission to begin the fun."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the other, "yeh look square an' yeh talk square, but, by hoky! yeh don't ride square."

"You are insulting," said Bill. "Whether I ride square or talk square can be none of your business; and who commissioned you to inquire about my honesty or integrity?"

"By hoky! yehr a bird," said the other; but, seeing the dangerous glitter in Bill's eyes, he added: "Wait a minute; I'm not tryin' t' insult yeh. I haint no call t' do that, an' I neveah do insult a man onless I want t' fight him. Uv course, ef I tread on a man's toes without good reasons, I allus asks his pahdon. My name is Sandy, an' I reckon that are long enough an' good enough fur my friends, an' them as haint my friends, by hoky! I don't want t' please 'em. I hev fit Injuns, killed Greasers, tailed mavericks, an' chased cattle all uv my life. I know every foot uv ground, every stockman, every ranch, an' every mark and bran' from Red river t' the Gulf. I hev been out on a little skirmish fur the Three-Bar outfit, lookin' fur thieves that hev been operatin' 'roun' in these heah parts, an' when I seed yeh comin', I knowd by the way yeh rid yeh'r hawse yeh was'nt a cowboy, an' I thought yeh might be one uv the critters I wus huntin'; but yehr square way uv talkin' hev changed my mind consider'ble. I see yeh've nerve, an' yehr eyes tell me yehr square, so I'm willin' t' shake an' be friends, an' I 'll jine yeh in yehr trip t' the Three-Bar, fur I've got t' report thar to-morrow."

"All right, Sandy," said Bill, extending his hand; "it's a go. You are my friend—the first one I have made in Texas."

Bill now dismounted and allowed his horse to graze for a short time, after which the two resumed their journey toward the Three-Bar Ranch.

During the short rest Bill had time to examine and estimate the character and peculiar traits of his new-found friend more closely and accurately. Sandy was a typical cowboy; he was rather short in stature, of a stocky build, muscular, and evidently a man of unusual strength; his complexion had become dark and swarthy through long years of exposure in all kinds of weather, and he was almost as brown as an Indian; his keen blue eyes had in their depths a gleam of humor, which was wont to come to the surface when occasion demanded; his hair was a sandy red, and was probably the source of the name he had given. He moved about with a quick, cat-like tread, indicative of the fact that a life spent with wild horses, wild cattle, and dangerous Indians, had taught him the value of being quick and active on foot. He wore a sombrero, hunting-shirt, and trousers, and his boots were ornamented with long Mexican spurs; around his waist was a broad belt containing ammunition, a hunting-knife, and two revolvers, while his rifle was held in his hand.

They rode slowly along for two or three hours, and were ascending a knoll or rise in the prairie when Sandy's pony began to show signs of uneasiness; it snorted, shook its head, and in other ways indicated that something was wrong.

"That hawse neveh lies to me," said Sandy, "an' by the way hit's actin' hit can't mean but one thing —Injuns."

They immediately stopped and listened intently. Far away, but gradually growing more and more distinct, could be heard the hoof-beats of running horses. They hastened toward the brow of the hill to investigate, and as they reached a point from which they could see, there was borne to them across the distant space a wild confusion of exultant yells and then the sharp "crack! crack!" of a rifle.

"Comanches, by hoky!" exclaimed Sandy, as they reached the summit of the hill.

Half a mile out upon the plains a thrilling scene was being enacted. A dozen Comanche warriors, in all the glory of gaudy feathers and war paint, uttering wild yells and brandishing their weapons, were sweeping across the plains directly toward the two horsemen. About one hundred yards in advance of them, her pony evidently jaded and running with difficulty, was a young girl. As the Indians gained on her, coming nearer and nearer, she turned in her saddle, raised her rifle to her shoulder, took deliberate and accurate aim and fired. Before the report of the rifle could be heard by the horsemen, they saw the foremost Indian reel and fall from his horse.

"I reckon that Injun hev cashed in his checks an' quit the game," said Sandy.

Again the leaden messenger sped from the rifle, but this time the aim was not so true; instead of the Indian, it was his horse that received the bullet, and it pitched headlong to the ground, throwing its rider beneath the trampling hoofs. Despite the loss of their comrade and the fear inspired by the deadly rifle in the hands of the brave girl, the Indians still pressed forward, intent upon capturing her. Seeing that her pony must soon be overtaken, Bill and Sandy spurred their horses out upon the plain and quickly traversed the intervening space; when they were within range, the two men began pouring a rapid, deadly fire with their rifles into the approaching warriors. Appalled by the daring of the two horsemen who were making this bold attack, and dismayed by the results of the accurate rifle-firing, the braves quickly turned and sought safety in flight; but too late to escape a raking fire from three rifles,—for the girl, seeing that help was at hand, had dismounted and was using her rifle with good effect.

Bill and Sandy pursued the fleeing Indians for a considerable distance, and until they disappeared over the hill; then, turning, they approached the girl, who was standing by her horse waiting for them.

. . . .

In the spring of 1866 the Comanche Indians were active in making raids on the frontier ranches for the purpose of stealing ponies. They always preferred ponies that were well fed and broken to the saddle, because when in good condition the horses were better able to endure the hardships of the long rides which the Indians were compelled to make after starting back to their villages from these predatory raids.

Circle-Dot had a fine lot of ponies that were fed and kept in good condition for the spring work, and she valued them highly for this reason. About the first light moon in April a raid was made on her ranch and several of these ponies were taken. Early next morning the loss was discovered, and knowing that if she wished to recover them, pursuit must begin at once, she ordered her men to gather up the neighboring ranchmen while she would immediately follow on the Indians' trail, leaving the cowboys to take up the pursuit as soon as ready. A hurried ride of about twenty miles brought her in sight of the Indians, who were driving the ponies before them rapidly. She followed on cautiously, at the same time keeping a sharp lookout for the cowboys, who she knew would as quickly as possible follow on the trail. The Indians disappeared over the crest of a hill, and Circle-Dot urged her horse forward, not wishing to lose sight of them. As she approached the summit of this knoll, about a dozen Indians who had dropped back from the main band, evidently intending to capture her, rushed their horses at full speed toward the girl, hoping by this ruse to take her prisoner before she could escape. They had turned their own jaded ponies into the herd, and were mounted upon some of the stolen ones.

The pony Circle-Dot rode was a good one, and if fresh would have distanced her pursuers with ease; but the long gallop it had already made had winded it materially, and it was now in no condition for a long race. She realised, however, that her only hope for safety lay in instant flight, and turning her pony, she started back toward the ranch. Then began a race for life and liberty such as she had never before made.

At first her brave little pony ran steadily and strong; each leap it made widened the distance between her and the Indians. It was evidently their purpose to capture her alive if possible, but she was beyond the range of their bullets, and they were compelled to rely upon eventually running down her pony. Circle-Dot well knew the danger of overdoing her animal, and when she was beyond reach of their guns she decreased her speed and held the distance between herself and the Indians about the same. The race continued in this way for several miles, when her pony began to show signs of distress and to involuntarily slacken its speed, while the pursuers were gaining on her preceptibly. No help was in sight, and it was a long road yet before she could hope to receive assistance, but her nerves were calm and steady and her brave heart never faltered. Unslinging her rifle from her shoulder, she prepared to sell her life dearly. Each leap the gallant little pony made seemed weaker and shorter, and she knew it could travel but a short distance farther, for she was approaching a higher plateau and it was apparent that she could not reach the summit in advance of the Indians, who were so rapidly gaining that they had now got within range of her rifle. She had refrained from shooting up to this time, but believing it her last chance for life, she turned in her saddle and with a steady hand and accurate eye, took deliberate aim and fired. It was at this time that Bill and Sandy appeared and assisted her, as before related.

As the two men approached the girl, who was standing by her pony waiting for them, Bill raised his hat and bowed, his face flushing with surprise, pleasure and excitement, for here, many miles out upon the plains, far away from civilization, where he had not thought of seeing a woman, he beheld the most beautiful girl that he had ever met. A girl under twenty years of age, having rather a slight, willowy, graceful form, bright blue eyes that gleamed with intelligence, a wealth of golden hair surmounted by a sombrero which was caught up on one side and looped with a silver cord. She wore a tight-fitting jacket, richly embroidered and worked with beads, a skirt made of buckskin, fringed and beaded, and on her feet decorated Indian moccasins; she wore silver spurs and a belt containing two revolvers, and her handsomely mounted repeating-rifle she still held in her hand.

She met them with a pleasant smile, and before they could speak said: "Gentlemen, I realize that you have saved my life, and words are inadequate to express to you my gratitude. My pony could have lasted but a short time longer, and had it not been for your assistance I would now be dead, for I had resolved not to be captured alive."

"We wuz mighty tickled t' give the red critters a little fight," said Sandy, "an yeh wuz shoarly holdin' yehr own with 'em; the way yeh drapped that red buck on the run wuz sartainly purty, an' ef yehr hawse hed been fresh, yeh wouldn't needed any help."

"We were glad to have the opportunity and the ability to assist you," said Bill. "I hope you have suffered no injury from their bullets."

"I think they did not try to hit me until the last," said Circle-Dot. "But you have not fared so well," continued she anxiously; "you are wounded," and she pointed to Bill's arm, where the blood was staining his shirt.

"Merely a scratch," said Bill, "and Sandy can bandage it in a moment." The sleeve was pushed up, and it was found that a bullet had grazed the arm, not making a dangerous wound.

"How many of the warriors were pursuing me, Sandy?" asked Circle-Dot.

"Thar wuz a even dozen uv 'em at fust," said Sandy, "but owin' t' several little accidents, thar wuz but seven uv 'em got away."

Then remembering that Bill was a stranger to Circle-Dot, he introduced him to her as his new friend.

"Bill, Circle-Dot are the purtiest, bravest and best gal in Texas," said Sandy.

"Sandy is complimenting me," said Circle-Dot; "but I am sure I never made a new friend under more auspicious surroundings, and you and Sandy will always be remembered by me."

The conversation was continued but a short time, when a body of horsemen were seen approaching, whom Circle-Dot recognized as the ranchmen and cowboys who were pursuing the Indians to recover the ponies. They were told of the events that had occurred, and after congratulating Circle-Dot upon her fortunate escape they pressed forward, hoping to overtake the Indians and recover the horses.

Circle-Dot had not entirely recovered from the exciting adventures through which she had just passed, and for that reason did not accompany the pursuing cowboys, but mounted her pony, and, bidding Bill and Sandy a kindly adieu, started at a brisk gallop toward her ranch, which she reached without further incident.

On their way to the Three-Bar Ranch, Sandy told Bill all he knew about Circle-Dot, always expressing the belief, that "thar wus no gal in Texas that wus her ekil."

They finally reached their destination, where Bill applied for a position as a cowboy, and was promptly employed, after having been eloquently and warmly recommended by Sandy, who had taken a great fancy to this stranger. Bill was turned over to Sandy for instructions in regard to his duties, and under the careful coaching of his friend proved an apt pupil.

CHAPTER III.

THE COWBOY.

After the blockade had been established along the Gulf ports, during the Civil War, there was no market for Texas cattle, except a small per cent that were driven to the Mississippi river and sold to the Confederate Government. The majority of them, however, were left upon the range, where their natural increase for several years doubled and trebled their numbers, and it is probable that no country in the world ever produced as many cattle on an equal amount of territory as did the cattle-growing districts of Texas.

When the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company first began extending a line of road up the Kansas river, the ranchmen of Texas had opened up to them the first real market for cattle, had since the war. Abilene, Kansas, was the first town to gain notoriety as a cattle market on that road, and the first great drives were made to that place. This was the beginning of that industry which afterwards developed into such proportions that the cattle markets of the world were controlled by it. To reach this market the cattle had to be selected and gathered up from the prairies of Texas and driven from six hundred to a thousand miles, across the open plains, through a hostile Indian country.

These conditions created a demand for the genuine Texas cowboy, who from 1867 to 1880 was in the zenith of his glory. Like a meteor he flashed across the boundless plains, the advance guard of civilization; the connecting link between the cattlemen of Texas and the shippers of the North, making trade and commerce possible between them. He lives now only in the traditions of the past. The conditions that created him no longer exist; his services are no longer required. Hence he has gradually disappeared, leaving no trail behind. Living upon the vast frontier plains, breathing the pure air, uncontaminated by furrowed fields or smoky towns, his days spent in the saddle, galloping over the prairies, guarding and driving the wild Texas herds; at night Mother Earth for his couch and the sky for his canopy, where, rolled up in his blanket, he could count the stars and watch the shifting clouds float across the heavens, the cowboy was boon companion with Nature. Rude, unlettered and unsophisticated he may have been, for his thoughts and actions were unfettered by the intricacies of the written law and his feet were not wont to tread along paths defined by the social code, for his conduct was moulded by his own inherent sense of right and wrong. His life was a strenuous one, a strange blending of the storm-cloud and the sunshine. His daily work, coupled as it was with hardships and dangers, made him wild and reckless and caused him to place a light value on human life. He would shoot to kill on slight provocation, yet he would scorn to take advantage of a foe, and never fired unless his adversary was armed and ready for the fray. Surrounded by environments that often made him appear relentless and cruel, yet he was warm-hearted and true, and was never known to turn a deaf ear to those in distress or to desert a friend in time of need. Although impulsive and reckless, he was also upright and just. Truth, honesty and fair dealing formed a part of his nature, and the Golden Rule was the guiding star that led him along the lonely trail. The patter of his pony's hoofs beating against the sod as he galloped over the prairies, the gentle lowing of the cattle, the howling of the coyotes by night, the cracking of his revolver as it would vibrate over the plains, the clashing of horns and roaring of hoofs, in the great stampede, were music to his soul, gave zest to existence, and made his life worth living.

Many long years have elapsed since these "free lances" of the Plains had complete sway and dominion over the cattle industry of the great Southwest. The erstwhile cowboy has long since forsaken his early vocation for more civilized and remunerative, if not more congenial, employment. The wild free life is past and gone. He now hears the sweet notes of the piano instead of the howling of the coyote, the rattling of the street-cars instead of the roaring stampede. Gray hairs and loss of vigor may prevent him from riding a bucking broncho, but nothing, save death, can blot out the vivid recollections of those halcyon days when he was a cowboy.

The first great drives of cattle were made to Abilene, Kansas, because that was the nearest point at which the railroad could be reached without driving through the settled districts. For the same reasons, after the railroad was started to build up the Arkansas river, the cattle trade was transferred to Newton, Wichita, Great Bend, and Dodge City. All of these towns and many others along the different lines of railroads were, at certain intervals, famous for their heavy receipts of cattle, and for the daily exhibition of cowboy life on the streets.

The worst class of thieves, thugs and murderers flocked to these towns, for the purpose of reaping a harvest from the wages of the cowboys. The better element was overwhelmed by this deluge of reckless adventurers, and the cowboys were systematically drugged, doped and robbed, and when they became desperate and shot a few of these robbers, they were rated as hard characters and desperadoes. This ban was placed not only upon the perpetrators of these lawless deeds, but upon every cowboy that wore the sombrero and the spurs. Orderly and quiet cowboys would be met at the threshold of some little village, that would never have been heard of but for the fact that the cattle business was making it money, and told that they must be orderly and discreet while there, for if this injunction was not obeyed they would be driven out of town. This unnecessary threat would make the high-spirited cowboys indignant, and the first town marshal that attempted to control them would probably get into trouble and some rash young fellow might take a shot at the buttons of brass on the officer's coat; and then the inevitable conflict between the regular constituted authorities and the cowboys would ensue. Often some one would get killed, and the report would go out that the trouble arose by cowboys attempting to "shoot up" the town.

The whole truth has never been told about these cowboy escapades, but one fact is so apparent it has never been disputed: that is, with all of his faults and all of his vices, the average cowboy was far better than the men who congregated at these towns for the purpose of getting the revenue derived from the saloons and dance-houses, and who lived solely upon the wages earned by the cowboys during their long drives.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY FROM ARKANSAS.

At the time of which we write, the cattle business in Texas was conducted in an entirely different manner from what it is to-day. Then, there were no fences, no metes nor bounds, restricting the grazing-lands, and no cattle-herders to watch after the grazing herds. The cowboy at that time would have scorned the appellation of cow-herder; that business, when done at all, was done by "Greasers," as the Mexicans were universally called; and an easy way to start a shooting-match with a cowboy would have been to refer to him as a cow-herder. Many ranchmen at that time owned from ten to fifty thousand head of cattle, running at large upon the range, and it required an army of young men to mark, brand and drive them to market; hence every ranch had a number of cowboys who became almost like fixtures on the place, because, after following a certain mark and brand for one or more seasons, the knowledge of the cattle thus obtained made them of more value to that particular ranchman than they could possibly have been to any other; therefore but few changes were made, and by such long associations the boys often became very much attached to one another.

Bill Parker and Sandy soon became the best of friends, and, under the careful training and directions of Sandy, Bill soon mastered all the arts necessary to become an expert cowboy, and before he was with the outfit six months could pass muster with the best of them.

One evening, as the boys were gathered about the corral, telling of the day's adventures, laughing at and enjoying the amusing incidents being related, they saw advancing toward them a stranger, whose appearance attracted their attention. He was a tall, lank, loose-jointed boy, apparently about eighteen years of age, with freckled face, red hair, and withal a good-natured, intelligent look, and an air of rustic innocence. He inquired for the boss of the ranch, and Sandy volunteered to conduct him to the foreman, and the two started off together.

"I come all the way from Arkansaw," he explained to Sandy, "an' I reckon I kin jest about ride any hawse in Texas. I've driv all kinds uv cattle, an' ef this heah outfit 'll hire me, I'll show you-uns that I'm shoah wuth the money."

After a short talk with the foreman, the new man was employed, and took his place with the Three-Bar boys.

The next morning they prepared to go out and gather up some straggling cattle. Jim Bruce, the new man, was instructed to go down to the corral, catch and bring up the yellow pony. Jim started to comply with this request, but after an absence of half an hour returned looking puzzled and perplexed, and not bringing the pony.

"Wat's the matter, Jim?" asked Sandy.

"Wall, that air blamed hawse jest won't stan' still, an' the other hawses run roun' an' roun' in the pen an' git in the way, so I wusn't able t' git closer 'n fifty feet uv him," said Jim ruefully. "Mebby ef we take some salt down thah, we kin git closeh an' slip the rope on t' him," he added.

"Salt the devil!" said Sandy in disgust. "Throw the rope on him."

"But I tell yeh he won't stan' fur nobody t' throw the rope on him," answered Jim.

"Come with me," said Sandy, and picking up Jim's lariat he walked down to the corral, and, forming a loop in the rope, he circled it around and gently dropped it over the pony's head and quietly led it out of the corral.

"We-uns don't ketch no hawses that-a-way in Arkansaw," said Jim.

"No, yeh ketch 'em with molasses like ketchin' flies, I reckon," responded Sandy.

"No," replied Jim; "Dad would hol' out some salt in his han', an' when the hawse come up t' lick hit, Dad would take him by the foretop an' lead him off."

"Well, by hoky! yehr Dad wouldn't hev much luck ketchin' hawses down heah," replied Sandy. "But we must git a hustle on ourselves. Heah, put this saddle on the hawse an' git ready t' go, ur the boys will be leavin' us."

He handed Jim a cowboy saddle having a heavy California tree, large wooden stirrups, a ten-inch horn, and two heavy hair girths. Jim examined the saddle carefully to see which end was intended for the front, and picking it up with some difficulty succeeded in placing it upou the pony's back.

"Why do you-uns hev two belly-bands?" he inquired as he gazed at the double girths, trying to discover their different functions. "An' how do these durned things fasten?" he asked in consternation, as he looked at the long straps on the rings with a confused idea as to their proper use.

Sandy fastened the straps, explaining to Jim how it was done; then handed the reins to him, and stepped back to see the fun which he knew was coming.

The horse selected for Jim was an old cow-pony, well trained and faithful; one that understood his work, and that probably knew more about a cowboy's duties than Jim would learn in twelve months; but with all his good qualities, he was a broncho, and, true to the instincts of all ponies of that breed, would invariably begin the morning's work with a little exercise in bucking. The cowboys know of this peculiarity in the broncho and are not disturbed by it, for they also know how to prevent its continuation. Jim, however, was not an experienced cowboy, and was not familiar with the peculiar characteristics of this breed of ponies. He seized the pony's mane with one hand and the saddle-horn with the other, and proceeded to climb upon it in much the same manner as he would climb to the top of a rail fence.

The broncho evidently knew that it was being mounted by a green hand, and before Jim was fairly in the saddle it had taken the bits firmly in its teeth, lowered its head, and began a series of jumps and stiff-legged bucks that would equal the work of an accomplished acrobat.

"See him choke the saddle!" exclaimed one of the boys, as Jim let go of the bridle-rein and grabbed both hands around the saddle-horn with a grip of desperation, at the same time endeavoring to make his seat more secure by locking his feet under the pony.

"Stick t' him; he's only foolin' with yeh," yelled Sandy; "an' he can't buck much nohow ef yeh sock the irons into him good an' plenty."

Jim's heart was filled with consternation and fear, and he did not heed this friendly advice from Sandy, for the matter was becoming serious with him; his eyes bulged out with fear, and great beads of sweat stood out in bold relief on his forehead. Up went the broncho, and then down again, with that indescribable jar which causes the rider to see stars and experience the sensation of seasickness. Another jump forward, then a quick backward movement of the pony, and Jim lost his hold of the saddle-horn, pitched over the pony's head, and with his long arms and slender legs winding round and round, he struck the ground fully fifteen feet in advance. He arose and gazed around with a bewildered look until he saw the other cowboys convulsed with laughter, when he angrily exclaimed:

"Mebby I can't ride as good as some uv yeh fellers, but I kin whip the whole outfit uv yeh, an' I'm ready t' do hit right now."

Jim was unacquainted with the duties of a cowboy, and in many things pertaining to that business he was deficient, but he possessed a good fund of common-sense and could learn quickly.

When Sandy returned that evening, Jim called him to one side and asked that he be taught the way to ride horses in Texas, remarking that—

"We-uns haint no sich hawses in Arkansaw as you-all hev got heah."

Sandy had a big, warm heart, full of the milk of human kindness, and he was impelled to take this boy under his tutelage, and if possible make of him a competent cowboy. He therefore took the boy with him to his quarters, and proceeded to explain to him how to ride a horse.

"In the fust place," began Sandy, "yeh larn t' ride by ridin'. Afteh yeh hev rid a hawse every day fur two ur three months, yeh sorter git use t' the motions, an' every move the hawse makes yehr body follers. When yeh staht t' put on the saddle, see that hit is cinched tight; don't be skeered uv hurtin' the hawse, but draw the girth up so he can't hardly breathe—hit will git loose enuff afteh yeh hev rid awhile. Anotheh thing is, hit haint no airthly use t' try an' ride a broncho without spuhs; put big Mexican spuhs on yehr feet, so yeh ken dig through the hide every lick. Don't be long about gittin' on a hawse, but climb on t' him befoah he knows yehr comin'. Hole yehr reins in yehr left han', ketchin' hole uv the saddle-horn with the same han'; turn yehr back t' the hawse's head, raise yehr left foot an' put hit into the stirrup, yeh are then ready t' git on. When the hawse feels yehr weight in the stirrup he'll jump for'ard an' that will throw yeh into the saddle. Don't be skeered, ur excited, fur yeh hev the advantage of him. Remember, all bronchos are alike about buckin', an' as soon as they feel yehr weight on 'em they will staht an' yeh want t' be ready t' staht with 'em.

"Hole' t' the reins firm, but not too tight, fur ef the pony reahs on his hin' feet, yeh might pull him back'ard an' git yehrself hurt. Ef he wants t' run, let him go, fur yeh kin shoahly ride as fast as he kin run, an' hit's a cinch that he can't hurt yeh none by runnin'; but when he stahts t' buck, stick yehr spuhs in him, an' every jump he makes stick him harder 'til he breaks in t' a run, when he'll stop buckin', fur no livin' pony kin stan' t' be gouged by them spuhs. He can't run fast an' buck at the same time, so he'll soon git tired uv bein' spuhed, an' quit buckin' fur the rest uv the day; but the next day yeh'll hev t' break him again. Afteh awhile yeh sorter git used t' his ways an' yeh enjoy his buckin' as much as he does hisself."

The next morning the same pony was brought out for Jim, who girted the saddle tightly, and, following Sandy's instructions, he was soon securely seated on the pony's back. The broncho began its exercise in bucking as usual, but Jim spurred him vigorously until the bucking ceased and the pony was in good working order. Jim was proud of this effort, for he had demonstrated the fact that he had profited by his riding lesson.

The well-trained cow-pony never makes a mistake in its work. You can ride it into a herd of cattle and by a very slight motion indicate the animal you desire to cut out, and this practically ends the rider's part of the work. The pony will follow it unerringly through the shifting, moving mass of cattle, wind in and out among the herd in close pursuit of the animal, finally landing it on the outside of the herd, and then with rare skill and accuracy force it to leave the other cattle, direct and follow it to the other herd or corral.

All this will be done with but slight assistance from the rider, and a mistake will never be made.

Jim's pony was an expert at this kind of work, and Jim entered into it with considerable vim and energy, for he determined, if possible, to redeem his reputation, which he feared had been injured by his first trial at riding.

On this morning a herd was being held on the range for the purpose of enabling the cowboys to cut out some cattle that were to be driven over to another herd about half a mile distant. Jim rode into the herd and directed his pony toward the animal he wanted, but he had his own ideas about the way he wanted to drive it, and unfortunately, they were in conflict with the ideas of the pony. Jim pulled the rein, trying to direct the pony the way he thought it ought to go, but the broncho, knowing that Jim was in the wrong, simply turned its head the way Jim directed, and continued to follow the animal in its own way, because it knew that way was the correct one. The result was that Jim was making a complete failure in his work, and this conflict of ideas was making the cattle restless and uneasy. The other cowboys, fearing he would cause a stampede, called him out and away from the herd. Jim was considerably crestfallen, and, riding over to Sandy, he again sought his advice.

"How do you-uns git the critters out from the others?" he asked, looking appealingly at his friend;

"I can't do nothin' with 'em, an' this durned hawse won't go nowhar but jest sideways."

"Yeh sartinly are green," responded Sandy; "yeh imagine that yeh know more the fust day yeh work than that pony, that hev worked at this business all hits life. Now ef yeh'll jest ride yehr pony in t' the herd an' show hit the critter yeh want t' cut out, an' then let him alone, he'll bring hit out in a hurry, an' yeh wont be troubled none t' git the one yehr afteh."

Jim again rode into the herd, and, following Sandy's directions, he gave the pony a free rein, after directing it toward the animal desired, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing it run to the outside of the herd and turn toward the other bunch of cattle, Jim's pony following it at full speed. Just before reaching the herd, the animal turned squarely to the right, going at a right angle to the direction it had been pursuing. Jim's pony, although going at full speed, also turned squarely to the right, and continued in close pursuit. The rider was not prepared for this sudden change in direction, and the momentum he had acquired forced him forward on a line parallel to his original course. Here is where the pony and rider parted company, and Jim was again unhorsed. Fortunately he was not hurt, but with a sorrowful heart, feeling downcast and discouraged, he followed in the wake of his pony, which did not slack its speed or vigilance until the animal was safe in the desired herd.

CHAPTER V.

SANDY TELLS JIM ABOUT TEXAS.

Sitting upon a log which lay up against the side of their "shack," gazing far away over the moon-lit prairie, obscured occasionally by the clouds of smoke from their pipes, Sandy and Jim sat until a late hour one night, Sandy telling in his picturesque way of the cowboy life which to him was as familiar as the air he breathed. Jim listening with rapt attention to the description of a life into which he was about to enter. Drawn out by the interest displayed by Jim and by the eager questions asked, Sandy told of the horses, cattle and men, and of the country which produced them.

"Jim, yeh want t' get a pair uv pistols the fust chance yeh hev," said Sandy, "because a man is not dressed heah ontil he has two uv 'em buckled roun' his waist."

"I've got one," Jim replied, producing a small revolver.

Sandy looked at it for a moment, and then in a sarcastic tone inquired, "Wat's that?"

"Pistol, uv course," said Jim.

"Wat's hit fur?" asked Sandy.

"Why t' shoot with," replied Jim.

"Well, sonny, don't yeh nevah make no breaks with that toy gun. Yeh couldn't kill a centipede with hit, and in a fight yeh would be killed an' git cold befoah yehr enemy got close enought fur yeh t' hit him with that thing. No, Jim, git a pair uv 44 caliber navies, fur when the time comes that yeh need a gun, yeh will be awful lonesome without 'em."

"Talkin' 'bout hawses," continued Sandy, "thar haint but one kind uv a hawse that's worth a cuss ez a cow-pony. Some fellers that haint got no moah sense than a gopher will git one uv these hyar Injun hawses an' then cuss an' beat 'em fur not bein' no good. Them is the fellers that is lookin' fur somethin' purty. A hawse is jest as oncertain an' onreliable as a woman, an' when a feller takes 'em fur their looks, they haint no right t' kick when they fin' they haint no good for nothin' else.

"These hyar Injun ponies are heavy-sot an' sorter bench-legged; an' as fur runnin', why, a possum could beat 'em in a fair race, an' ef they step in a gopher-hole, they'll fall down, cause thar haint no action about 'em no more than thar is 'bout a turtle.

"Ef yeh wuz t' be on one uv them Injun ponies an' a wile bad steer should git after yeh hit would shoahly run oveh both uv yeh. The truth uv the matteh is, Jim, that the only pony worth hits salt fur a cow-pony is a broncho. Yeh git a wile broncho, 'bout the ugliest one yeh kin fin', with long ganglin' legs that look like they wuz tanglin' up every step hit takes; let hit be yoe-necked an' a little sway-backed, hits hide a pale yaller ur a muckly dun, with some black hairs runnin' down hits back. Hit may be wile es a young antelope an' buck so hawd the fleas an' ticks kaint stick on hit, but yeh kin ride hit a hundred miles a day an' put hit on the lariat at night, an' afteh hit rolls oveh a couple uv times an' goes t' feedin' hit'll be fresh an' nimble as befoah, an' next mawnin' hit'll buck as ef that wuz the fust time the girth wuz eveh cinched aroun' hit, an' hit'll never git tired, neveh fall down, an' neveh furgit what hit has learned.

"Yeh want t' know how we hitch our hawses, out on the prairies whar there haint no fences nor no trees. Well, my boy, we don't hitch 'em; we jest put a good stiff curbed bit in theah mouth an' have a good long stout rein t' our bridle, an' when we git off uv the hawse we throw the reins oveh hits head t' the groun' an' let hit trail along. Ef the hawse is green when hit stahts t' go hit'll shoahly step on the trailin' reins, an' that'll jerk hit back some. When hit stahts agin hit gits jerked back agin, an' eveh time hits mouth is hurt awful bad, so in a little while hit learns that when hit steps hit gits jerked an' when hit don't step hit don't git hurt, so hit soon quits hits foolishness an' stan's still. Afteh a little trainin' yeh kin leave hit stan' fur half uv a day an' on yehr return will fin' the pony right whar yeh left hit. Yeh kin throw a blanket at that pony an' hit'll not move, but the minute yeh take up the reins an' mount, hit stahts off like a rocket, as wile an' unruly as eveh, an likely will buck yehr hat off befoah yeh git hit down t' business agin.

"Now 'bout throwin' a rope; thar's lots t' learn, an' then yeh will neveh be an expert, fur the reason that a feller kaint savvy this business afteh he has growed up like yeh have, fur t' be fust class yeh must begin t' learn when yehr a kid, an' yeh must practice every day ontil yeh git so yeh kin ketch anything. I began t' learn when I wus a little tad. Instead uv givin' me marbles an' balls t' play with, my dad gave me a rope, an' I wus taught t' throw hit on anything that wus big enough t' hol' the rope. I fust throwd hit ovah a stake in the groun', an' then ovah the pigs an' geese an' ducks an' chickens, an' ovah dad an' mam an' the kids an' the neighbors, an' evah thing that could be held by a rope. I had the ol' geese an' ducks aroun' our house so accustomed t' the rope that when they seed hit a-comin' they would jest squat down an' let hit fall ovah 'em, because they knew by formah experience how useless hit wus t' try t' escape. Yeh have seed me use a rope some an' yeh know I kin ketch anything except a flyin' bird, an' I kin give them a purty close call. The best an' most durable lasso is platted frum the long hairs taken frum a hawse's tail an' wove together into a smooth roun' rope. One uv these lassos will be soft an' pliable, although exposed t' all kinds uv weatheh, an' hit is stronger than any other kind uv rope, but they cost a whole lot uv money, an' yeh kin buy a hawse cheaper than yeh kin one uv these lassos, but hit will last a lifetime aftah yeh have got hit.

"Jim, yeh shoaly have got a whole lot t' learn befoah yeh can make a good han' at the cattle business. In the fall uv the yeah we have the general round-up, when all uv the calves an' the other cattle that have befoah escaped are marked an' branded. We have large brandin'-pens built at convenient places on the range, an' we all go on the drive together, an' when we git quite a herd uv cows an' calves an' other cattle that are not branded we drive 'em t' one uv these corrals, which are made strong an' stout so the cattle kaint break out uv 'em. At one end ur side uv the corral we have a brandin'-chute which leads out frum the pen about ten feet, an' jest large enough fur one steer t' enter, an' when the critter is driv' in, he gits sorter wedged tight, so he kaint turn roun' nor do nothin' else but jest beller, an' the bars air slipped in behin' him, an' the brandin'-irons, which air het at fires kept goin' fur that purpose jest outside uv the pen, air slapped on t' him an' held thar ontil hit burns him good an' planty, an' then the bars in front uv him air pulled out an' the animal is turned loose on t' the range, bellerin' an' kickin'; but the brand is burnt in t' him, an' will nevah come out.

"When yeh git out with the boys in the fall an' help do the brandin', yeh'll have a heap uv fun. Yeh know the ol' Mexican that works with the outfit. Well, that ol' cuss kin furnish more fun with a brandin' outfit than yeh evah seed, fur when we git a particularly wile an' woolly steer that makes up hits min' that hit won't be branded nowhow, but jest tries t' tear down everything in sight, ole Pedro climbs onto the fence an' slips his rope aroun' the critter. He puts one end uv the rope through the loop an' jumps onto the animal fur a ride. The boys take down the bars an' turn hit loose. The steer comes with his eyes bulgin' out an' nearly skeerd t' death, an' uv all the buckin' an' jumpin' yeh eveh seed that is the worst. The steer runs, jumps an' cavorts aroun' with hits tongue hangin' out, till Pedro gits tired uv the fun an' slips his rope loose an' hops off, an' the steer, too skeerd t' fight, runs off on the range. In the spring uv the yeah we hev the tailin', an' I'll tell yeh how hit's done. In the fall when the general roun'-up is had, we know whose calf we are markin' an' brandin', because the calf is then follerin' hits motheh, an' uv course the owner uv the cow also owns the calf, but we can't git all the cattle in the fall, an' by spring the calves are weaned, an' then nobody knows who is the owner of 'em. Well, the question uv ownership is settled by the stockmen in a little grab game, called tailin', which is done in this way: We ride out upon the range, find a herd uv grazing cattle, select one that bears no mark ur bran', separate hit from the herd an' start hit off at full speed, follerin' close in the rear, pressin' hit hard all the time, an' at the right minute yehr pony will pass up on the left side uv the animal. Yeh will then lean from yehr saddle an' ketch a firm grip with yehr right han' upon the tail uv the calf, an' as hit raises hits hin' quarters in takin' the next leap yehr pony will increase hits speed an' yeh will at the same time hist on the tail uv the calf an' hit will lose hits balance an' fall hard t' the groun'. The pony will stop within less than five feet uv hit, an' yeh will quickly git off uv yehr hawse an' befoah the critter hez regained hits breath yeh will hev the mark uv the ranch on hits ears, an' then hit belongs t' yehr ranch, and next fall at the annual roun'-up hit is branded. When yeh hev marked the animal yeh must climb on yehr hawse in a hurry, fur hit will git up a-fightin' an' yeh hev t' move purty lively t' escape some trouble. A good cowboy kin throw any kin' uv a steer in that way, an' sometimes we do hit when they git mad an' want t' fight us, an' that ginerally cures 'em; but ef hit don't stop hits fightin', the next remedy is t' shoot hit in the nose; that will shoahly fix 'em."

CHAPTER VI.

BARNARD RAYMEZ.

Barnard Raymes was born upon a plantation in Louisiana. His father was a wealthy planter, and the son had every advantage that wealth and social position could procure. He was graduated from an Eastern college, and at his father's death was left an inheritance that made him one of the wealthiest men in the State. He was of Spanish descent, and from his ancestors had inherited that fiery temperament which brooked no opposition nor yielded to any influence contrary to his own desire. After leaving college, he located in New Orleans, and left there only after having squandered most of his fortune in gambling and riotous living. When he realised that his fortune was gone, and that he could no longer maintain his fashionable quarters in the city, he sold all of his possessions and removed to Texas, where he settled on the Brazos river, near the Circle-Dot ranch, and entered into the cattle industry, hoping in this manner to retrieve his lost fortune. He was an ambitious man, and believed that plenty of money was all that made life desirable. By years of hard struggling and strict economy on the frontier he accumulated large herds of cattle, and his ranch had grown to such proportions that he was accounted one of the wealthiest and most successful ranchmen in the State.

He had watched the Circle-Dot ranch develop under the magical and heroic management of the fair girl who had converted it into the best ranch in that part of the State, even surpassing his own in number of animals and other essential details. He looked with a covetous eye upon the Circle-Dot brand, with its countless herds and lovely owner, and into his mind there crept the thought that if these two ranches could be merged into one, all under his own control and management, then would his highest ambition be realized; for then none could dispute his supremacy as the wealthiest and most prominent ranchman in Texas. Of Circle-Dot he knew but little. He had been so exclusive and so engrossed with his own business that he had never formed the acquaintance of his neighbors; but when the thought of uniting the two ranches took possession of his soul, he decided to make friends with them, and for that purpose he one day rode over to the Circle-Dot ranch and introduced himself.

He was a handsome man, with manners suave and bland, and had the happy faculty of pleasing and entertaining anyone with whom he conversed. Circle-Dot and her mother were agreeably entertained and favorably impressed with this visit, being glad to form the acquaintance of such an elegant and intelligent man as this neighbor appeared to be. Barnard Raymes was entranced with the wit and beauty of Circle-Dot, and spent a very pleasant evening, going away more than ever determined to accomplish the desire of his heart by making Circle-Dot his wife.

From this time on a pair of blue eyes that seemed to read into his soul haunted him continually, and he became a frequent visitor at the ranch, until he learned to love Circle-Dot with all the fervor and power of his Spanish nature. Her beauty fascinated him, and he determined that her wealth should not escape him. He therefore resolved to win her, and that nothing should prevent the accomplishment of this purpose. Filled with these thoughts, he was constantly revolving in his mind every scheme that appeared plausible and likely to aid him in his suit. His first venture was to create a favorable impression with the mother, and, if possible, to enlist her aid in winning favor with Circle-Dot. With this purpose in view, he paid every attention to Mrs. Williams, and sought to gain her esteem and good-will by constant care and kindness. His manners were so perfect and his conduct so exemplary that she believed him to be a perfect gentleman. Realizing that this wealthy neighbor, who seemed to be above reproach, was deeply interested in her daughter, she did nothing to prevent this friendship, which might eventually unite the two families.

Coming to the ranch one day after he had known them for some time, Raymez found Circle-Dot away, and, seizing this opportunity, he told Mrs. Williams of his love for her daughter, and pictured to her in glowing terms the advantages to be derived from such an alliance. The mother, actuated by a desire for her daughter's welfare, gave her consent for him to woo, and if possible to win Circle-Dot's love. Knowing her nature and disposition, Mrs. Williams thought best not to inform Circle-Dot of the intentions of Raymez until their more intimate acquaintance would warrant him in speaking to her of the matter. However, she often spoke to Circle-Dot of Raymez in the most favorable terms, and frequently invited him to their home.

A short time after Bill and Sandy had rescued Circle-Dot from the attack of the Comanche Indians, she was talking the matter over with her mother and Barnard Raymez, and in relating the details of the adventure she praised the two cowboys in unstinted terms, referring to Bill as the bravest and handsomest young man she had ever met. This was gall and wormwood to Raymez. He was filled with jealous rage and hatred toward Bill, whom he now considered a possible rival for the affections of Circle-Dot. Adroitly directing and continuing the conversation about the two cowboys, he imagined he could discern that Circle-Dot was very favorably impressed with this stranger; this so incensed him that he could scarcely refrain from exhibiting his anger. Returning to his home, he began reflecting upon the new complications which might thwart his ambitious desires, and again resolved that nothing, not even the life of another, should stand between him and his cherished purpose.

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Riding along the breaks of the Brazos river one evening, Bill and Sandy came upon an old ranch-house, built against the rocky cliff, a board fence completing the inclosure and making a cosy little yard. On the sides were large stables and extensive corrals, indicating a prosperous cattle ranch. There was an air of comfort and neatness about this place which was wanting in the other ranches with which Bill was familiar, and he was very much impressed with the symmetrical construction and picturesque location of this frontier home.

"There is the prettiest ranch I have seen in Texas," said Bill; "I wonder who is the owner?"

"That belongs t' our friend Circle-Dot," replied Sandy. "An' by hoky! yeh are right, fur hit is the purtiest place this side of the Rio."

"So this is Circle-Dot's ranch," said Bill, as they rode toward the house. He had not forgotten his meeting with the owner of the ranch, and many times since that meeting the thoughts of the bright eyes and lovely face of that warm-hearted girl had cheered his lonely hours.

They rode up to the yard and were met by Circle-Dot, who was delighted to see them. She invited them to dismount, led the way to the house, and presented them to her mother. This gentle lady thanked them graciously for the services they had rendered her daughter, and assured them a hearty welcome to her home. So friendly and unaffected was Circle-Dot that Bill appreciated more and more her goodness of heart and sterling worth.

The boys were well pleased with the good-cheer and friendly greeting of the mother and daughter, and were so pleasantly entertained that they stayed until almost dusk. As they left the house and walked over to where their horses were tethered, mounted and prepared to depart, a stranger rode up and stopped near them. He was a tall, dark-complexioned, intelligent-looking man, and he scowled at the two cowboys as he drew near. Circle-Dot attempted to introduce him to her visitors as Barnard Raymez, a neighboring ranchman. Bill and Sandy each spoke pleasantly to him, but Raymez drew himself up haughtily, and turning his back toward the two cowboys, completely ignored their presence, and attempted to engage Circle-Dot in conversation. Bill's face flushed angrily at this deliberate insult, but he said nothing, because of Circle-Dot's presence.

Sandy, however, could not so easily control himself. Riding around in front of Raymez and looking him straight in the eyes, he said: "Looky heah, Raymes, I'm the ekil uv any Greaser, cowboy ur ranchman in Texas, an' I don't stan' fur no insults from nobody. Do yeh savvy?"

Raymes undoubtedly heard and understood, but before he could answer, Circle-Dot stepped between them, and, addressing Sandy, said: "Sandy, you and Bill are my friends and guests; Mr. Raymes is my neighbor; there can be no trouble between you here."

"I asks yeh pahdon, Circle-Dot," responded Sandy, "fur yeh see he sorter riled me, an' my temper haint sweet as yehrn, nowhow."

"The provocation was great," said Circle-Dot, "and I do not blame you very much, but you know that trouble must be avoided here."

"I am sorry this incident occurred here," said Bill, leaning forward to take her hand at parting. "I have enjoyed my visit very much, and I hope you will let us come again."

"You will always be welcome when you call," said Circle-Dot softly.

The boys then bade her good-by, and galloped away toward home, followed by the malevolent looks of Barnard Raymes.

The cowboys were unacquainted with the cause that induced him to insult them as he had done, and in discussing the matter as they rode homeward, Bill said: "I certainly have never met the man before, and have not the slightest conception of the reasons that induced him to treat us in that manner."

"By hoky! he don't know me, either," said Sandy, "but he hev got t' squar' accounts with me the fust time we meet."

CHAPTER VII.

JOE DINGBY.

Sandy was one day riding along the Brazos river in quest of a bunch of cattle that had strayed away from the herd, when in the distance he saw a team of jaded-looking ponies hitched to a covered wagon. The animals were grazing aimlessly along, choosing their own way, and apparently not being directed by a driver. His curiosity being aroused by this strange-looking outfit, he rode up and peered into the wagon. Lying on a bed of straw and skins was an old man, with a drawn and yellow face, indicating sickness and privation. By his side lay his wife, also sick and apparently unable to arise.

"Wat in tarnation hev happened t' yeh, stranger?" inquired Sandy.

The old man was startled at the sound of Sandy's voice, and, raising himself up on one elbow, in a weak voice he replied:

"Stranger, when Gabriel toots his hawn at the big roundup, I don't reckon I'll be nigh so tickled as I wus when I heard yehr voice just now. My ole 'oman an' me wus both tuck down with a sorter fever 'bout foah days back, an' the durned thing has stuck t' us closeh'n a Texas tick. I sorter held up till this mawnin', but then I couldn't drive the critters no moah, so I jest lay down an' let 'em move along theh own way."

Sandy took the old man and his wife to the ranch, where they were given medical treatment, and soon regained their health and strength. Joe Dingby, the name the old man had given, was very grateful for the cowboy's kindness, and finding a near-by shack he moved into it and announced that he was ready to quit his wandering life and to become a permanent citizen. Joe and his wife, Peggy, had spent the most of their married lives in a covered wagon, moving from place to place. Joe was in his humble way quite a philosopher, and said his reason for constant wandering was to find some country where a man could live without work.

"No white man need work," he declared, " 'specially if he has a good 'oman like Peggy to help him make a livin'.

"Me and Peggy hev moved so much that I know all uv the wagon-roads, the by-paths, and short cuts, in the country. I ken borry meal uv any settler along the road by promising to return it when I move back that way agin. When we do rent a house and move into hit, we neveh take all uv the things out uv the wagon, because when we staht to move agin the things will be already loaded."

The house which had been given him by the cowboys was made of logs and slabs, and the side made of flat slabs was soon covered by the skins of animals that Joe had slain, stretched up there to dry,—a striking testimonial to his accuracy with his rifle.

His wife, Peggy, was not a handsome woman: she was tall and angular, and had one blue eye, but the other one was brown. The brown eye looked straight at the person with whom she talked, but the blue eye appeared to be looking in an entirely different direction, for it turned toward the nose, and was decidedly crossed. Unlike Joe, she was industrious, and was all of the time at some kind of work, trying to make a living for herself and Joe. She was addicted to the use of "dip," and could always be seen with a little stick chewed to a brush at one end, projecting from her mouth; the saliva would inadvertently ooze from the corners of her mouth and gently drip to the floor, and if it ever mixed with the food she was preparing it was purely accidental and Joe's æsthetic taste was not developed to such an extent as to be disturbed by such trifling incidents.

Joe was the owner of a cur dog that had but one purpose in life, and that was to be a companion and servant for him. Day or night, hot or cold, rain or shine, it could always be found in company with its master, and no amount of abuse could induce it to desert or leave him. Joe loved this dog, and although he was not a fighting man and would avoid trouble or a quarrel as skillfully and adroitly as he would avoid work, yet if anyone assaulted the dog he had to reckon with the master, who would be transformed from a peaceable, timid man to an aggressive pugilist, for, as he expressed it,

"Thar wuz shore somethin' doin' when anyone stepped on Tige's tail."

The cur was a good hunter, and when Joe started out for game it would usually find some animal that he could kill for its meat or pelt. The skins of such animals would enable Joe to trade for whisky or tobacco, which he rated as the necessaries of life. He was an inveterate gambler, and was always ready to stake any thing he possessed, on a game of chance. He took a lot of pelts to town with him one day, which he sold for a neat little sum of money, and immediately went to a gambling-house, where he lost it all, and for that reason had to walk home without his usual drink of whisky, and minus his tobacco. He trudged along over many miles of rough and rocky roads, and finally, tired and hungry, sat down beneath the spreading branches of an old elm tree and began to muse and reflect, and then to talk to his faithful dog that was lying at his feet.

"Tige, yehr master is a chump, a fust-class chump, without sense ernuff t' toat swill t' the hawgs. I've jest got er line on t' myself, an' fin' I'm er sucker.

Nine big coon-skins, theah fuh wus soft an' fine es the down on er duck's breast; six polecat skins, all renovated, not er smell t' 'em; foah coyote's pelts an' one buffler wulf's pelt;—all gone, raked in by the gent that runs the game. Oh! he hes a cinch, a lead-pipe cinch. They all put in the coin an' the hole swallers up the dough. Hit mus' be a nice job t' hev a lot uv people workin' fur yeh all uv the time, bringin' in the stuff every night an' puttin' hit in the hole an' all the boss has t' do is t' count hit up next mawnin'.

"The boss gambler wears a biled shirt an' a big shiner in front; he drinks good whisky, smokes good terbacker, an' travels at er purty fast gate, but I walk home without my whisky er terbacker. Yes, I'm a perducer, I'm a fish. I'm tired an' hungry an' all played out. The moah I see uv life the moah I like yeh, Tige. I ken tie t' yeh, fur yeh'll not rob me, but yeh'll starve with me when I'm hungry an' fatten with me when I've plenty. Ef I ever gamble agin I'll own the table with a hole in hit, an' I'll do the receivin' an' the other feller ken do the perducin'; I'll count the money in the mawnin' an' they ken be the suckers. I'll wear the sparkler on my breast an' drink the good whisky. Come along, Tige; let's pull fur home; Peggy will shoahly hev some grub fur us when we git thar."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BULL-FIGHT.

"Curious, haint hit, how some people enjoy a bull-fight," said Sandy in response to a question by Jim, about this favorite Mexican entertainment. "I've heard lots uv people say hit wus wrong an' brutal, an' ought t' be stopped, an' I'm thinkin' they are right; but let me tell yeh, Jim, any ole time thar's a bull-fight comin' off everybody in the country will raise enough money t' pay the entrance-fee at the gate, an' the whole neighborhood will turn out that day, an' the fellers that run the show will hev dead loads uv money when the bull is killed. I've seed lots uv bull-fights in the little towns down in Chihuahua, but the hottest an' fastest bull-fight I evah did see wus at our ranch down on the Rio Grande last summah.

"We had been fixin' fur a yeah t' pull off a fust-class fight, an' when me an' my pahdner foun' a little ole maverick that wus the fightin'ist bull evah driv' int' a corral, we fixed up our show-groun's an' sent fur a Greaser that claimed t' be a fust-class matador, an' tole him t' git his toreadors together an give us a good fight.

"When the day come fur the fight, yeh ought'r hev seed the crowd that wuz thar; men, women an' children uv all kin's an' uv all classes come. Why, they crossed oveh frum the other side uv the rivah in boats by the thousands, an' frum the Texas side they come in droves an' eveh ranch in fifty miles uv the place wus deserted, an' befoah the time t' begin the fun eveh seat had been took an' lots uv 'em wus wanderin' roun' outside uv the arena lookin' fur a place whar they could see the fight.

"We had only two bulls, an' one uv 'em was not fust-class, but the other one, the little maverick, wuz the gamest bull I evah seed. Why, ef yeh spit at him in the corral, yeh would hev t' run ur fight; hit didn't need no banderillas stuck in hit befoah hit would git mad, fur hit wus mad all uv the time, an' we 'lowd that hit wuz a cinch that hit would ketch a hawse ef not a man befoah hit wus killed, an' yeh know the moah hawses an' men the bull ketches the moah fun an' excitement thar is fur the spectators. When the time t' begin the fight come, all uv the folks wus a callin' fur the bull an' a shoutin' fur the banderillero, an' when the gate wus open an' all uv the toreadors took theh places hit wuz so still yeh could heah a pin drap. Then the fust bull was turned in, an' hit put up a stiff little fight,—jest enough t' make the people all holler good an' plenty when the matador made a lucky stab an' killed hit.

"Then the little maverick wus turned in an' one uv the capos stahted t' wave his manteleta in front uv the bull, but the maverick wus afteh him so quick an' fast that he lost the red rag an' hed t' jump fur the railin' t' save his life. Then hit made fur one uv the picadors who wus sittin' on his hawse watchin' the fun, an' although huht considerable by the pica, hit ketched the hawse jest behin' the stirrup-leatheh an' gored the animal clean through, forcing the poah hawse t' the ground; but the picador wus too quick t' be ketched undeh his hawse, an' when he tried to use his pica agin the bull drawed his hawns out uv the dyin' pony an' made a rush fur the Greaser, an' hit took mighty quick work fur that picador t' git t' a place uv safety ahead uv the bull. While the mazos with theah mule teams wus draggin' the dead hawse out uv the ring a banderillero fastened two uv his banderillas in the bull's shoulder while a picador attacked hit from behin', an' quickeh 'n double-geared lightnin' the bull turned an' ketched the hawse in front, an' befoah hit could get away the pony wus down and gored t' death, while the picador was runnin' fur life.

"Ginerally when yeh shake the manteleta in a bull's face hit will leave eveh thing an' make fur the rag, but this little ole maverick didn't have common bull sense, fur hit neveh looked at the red cloth, but made fur the man quick an' fast; this was contrary to all rules uv bull-fightin' an' hit got the toreadors a little addled and busted up in business, an' in less 'n ten minutes eveh one uv 'em hed run fur safety an' wus hidin' out, skeerd nearly t' death, exceptin' the matador, who was boldly holdin' his ground and tryin' t' git a chance t' use his sword an' end the fight. The little bull looked roun' oveh the arena an' saw that eveh one uv hits tormentahs had run but the matador; hit lowered hits head and rushed the bull-killeh so that he hed t' do some good dodgin' t' git away, and when the bull turned back an' made another rush hit wus too quick for the Greaser. Hit ketched him on hits hawns an' tossed him up oveh hits head an' let him drap close t' hits feet; then hit tried t' gore him, but got one hawn undeh his arm, the otheh hawn between his shouldeh an' neck, an' pinned him t' the ground. Jest then I heerd a woman scream, an' saw a purty Mexican gal jump down from the railin' into the arena an' rush at the bull with her little stiletto in her right han' and raised above her head. Soon as she wus within reach uv the animal she stabbed hit several times jest behin' the shouldeh, tryin' t' reach hits heart.

"I saw that onless somethin' wus done purty quick thar would be a dead matador an' mebby a dead gal, too. I run out in the ring an' puttin' my revolver up agin the bull's head I pulled the triggeh an' the bull fell oveh, dead. The purty little señorita who had so bravely tried to save the matador's life wus his sweetheart, but she come mighty neah transferrin' her affections t' me when she seed how I hed saved her loveh.

"The people all said I hed not fit the bull fair, fur ef I hed hit would hev whipped the whole outfit; an' although I saved the lives of the matador an' the gal, I lost my reputation as a bull-fighteh."

CHAPTER IX.

INDIAN RAIDS.

The Comanche Indians were constantly on the warpath, and every light moon they would make a raid on the frontier settlements of northwestern Texas. They would come in following along on the highest ridges, for they could thus see the surrounding country for a considerable distance, and would be protected from ambush or sudden attack. They would swoop down upon the defenseless settlers, always killing any unfortunate man they could find; but sometimes they would carry off as captives women and children. The real purpose of these predatory raids, however, was to steal ponies, and they rarely went back without getting a good supply of them.

A band of about twenty-five warriors once made a raid down the head-waters of Elm creek, and at a ranch above Gainesville they found a herd of ponies that had been corn-fed and were in good condition for hard work. They succeeded in getting about twenty-five head of these animals, and started back to their stronghold on the Washita river. The cowboys at the ranch heard them driving the ponies away, and ten of them started in pursuit. They followed the trail until after daylight without overtaking the raiders, but when they reached Red river, about thirty miles above Gainesville, the Indians were just going up the bank on the other side of the stream. Sandy had been, by consent, put in command of the cowboys, and he ordered them to cross immediately, although the river was running full and they had to swim their ponies for more than fifty yards. North of the river where they had crossed was a thick growth of blackjacks, with the limbs growing down to the ground. The trees were very close together, forming a thick and almost impenetrable forest of limbs and brush. There was a narrow road that had been cut by the soldiers from Fort Arbuckle, to enable them to reach the river. Down this road the Indians were going at full speed, driving the stolen ponies before them. The cowboys were well mounted, and, following the Indians at a rapid pace, were soon in sight of them again. The wily savages dismounted, and led their ponies into the thick brush on either side of the road, and opened up a hot fire upon the advancing cowboys. Three of the Indians had been sent forward, crowding the stolen ponies furiously, hoping to escape with them while the cowboys were being held in check by the other warriors.

To rush upon the Indians, concealed as they were, would have been rash and unwise; therefore the cowboys dismounted and began advancing through the brush toward their foes. The battle lasted but a few minutes, for the cowboys kept advancing until the Indian braves were routed and compelled to remount their ponies and follow after their other men. They had scarcely reached the herd before the cowboys were again upon them, charging so furiously that they could not adopt their former ruse to hold the pursuers in check. Seeing that their strategy had failed, the Indians abandoned the herd, lay down upon their ponies, and started from the road into the timber through the thick brush, where no white man could follow, and thereby escaped. The cowboys stopped the herd of ponies and turned them back toward the ranch. A pony ridden by one of the cowboys was killed, and in falling broke the rider's arm, and one Indian and three of their ponies were left dead on the first battlefield.

When the cowboys returned to their ranch, they found five ponies dead that had been ridden in by the Indians and were no doubt considerably jaded, and to keep them from falling into the hands of the whites the Indians had killed them. Each pony had been killed by the thrust of a lance that had penetrated the heart, and each had died without a struggle, the lance-thrust having been made accurately and in a scientific manner, straight to the heart. A part of the skin had been removed from the hips of some of the ponies, and a considerable quantity of the flesh taken off, showing the manner in which the Indians procured their rations for their return trip.

A strong band of Indian warriors made a raid down through the settlements and into the town of Gainesville, one moonlight night. They killed and carried away seventeen persons and stole a large number of ponies, in this raid. A settler named Jacob Dyer lived about seven miles from town; the Indians made an attack upon his house in the middle of the night; the family were awakened by the hideous yells of the bloodthirsty savages. Dyer reached for his rifle, and prepared to sell his life dearly as possible. The door was broken down, and the Indians rushed in; Dyer fired, killed the foremost warrior. He then seized an ax, and fought desperately until he fell dead. His wife and three of the children were murdered; but May Dyer, the oldest child, a girl twelve years of age, was taken prisoner and carried away by the Indians.

On another occasion Bill and Sandy were attacked by five Indians as they were riding up Elm creek, near the grove west of Gainesville. After a sharp running fight of several minutes' duration the boys succeeded in routing the Indians, who rode away, leaving one of their warriors wounded and helpless on the ground. The cowboys went to the assistance of the wounded Indian, and finding that he was able to sit upon a horse, they put him on Sandy's pony and led the animal into town. A doctor was summoned, and under careful medical treatment the Indian fully recovered. He informed the cowboys that he was not a Comanche, but a Ponca warrior. His name was Lightfoot, and he said the Comanches had deserted him because he was not of their tribe. The Comanches considered it a disgrace to permit one of their number, either wounded or dead, to fall into the hands of the enemy.

Lightfoot was very grateful for the kind treatment received from the whites, and promised that he would never again join in a raid upon them. He said that from now on the palefaces were his friends and the Comanches his enemies. When told that he could now rejoin his own tribe, his joy knew no bounds. He called Bill and Sandy his brothers, assuring them that he would never forget their kindness, but would always be ready and willing to serve them.

One morning Joe Dingby set out for town to procure a supply of whisky and tobacco. Peggy had requested that he also purchase a hoe-handle, so that she could work the garden. He borrowed an old flea-bitten mule from a neighbor, and, neglecting to take his rifle, he slowly ambled into Gainesville.

Having sold some wolf-pelts, he made his purchases and started for home. The mule was ancient, lazy and stubborn, and despite constant urgings could scarcely be persuaded to move in a more rapid gait than a walk.

When about ten miles from the settlements, Joe was badly frightened when he saw three Indian warriors riding toward him. He beat the old mule with such a hearty good-will, prodding it with the hoe-handle and playing an incessant tattoo with his heavy boots upon its ribs, that he finally succeeded in inducing it to gallop. The best speed he was able to make, however, was not more than ten miles an hour, and the Indians were rapidly gaining upon him, shooting as they came.

But in this running fight the Indians could not shoot accurately, and the bullets whistled around Joe without doing him any harm, Seeing that they were gaining on him rapidly, Joe turned in the saddle and pointed the hoe-handle at them. Thinking it was a gun, the Indians threw themselves over on the opposite sides of their horses, as was their custom under fire, and slackened their speed, not wishing to get within range. They soon suspected, however, that the pretended gun would not shoot, and again began crowding him closely. It was at this critical moment that Joe with unspeakable horror felt his grip on the whisky jug relax, and in another moment it rolled upon the sod beneath the mule's feet. Not daring to pause in this race, he pushed frantically on, but the Indians stopped to sample the "fire-water," and relished it so much that they gave up the chase. This undoubtedly saved Joe's life, and he rode on safely home—all of the time deeply regretting the loss of his jug of whisky.

CHAPTER X.

THE TEXAS STEER IN THE ROUND-UP.

"Our native Texas steer is ginerally one uv the easiest animals yeh eveh seed t' drive. All yeh hev t' do t' make hit turn is t' travel along up to'ards hit's head an' hit will shoah give way, an' ef yeh keep pressin' hit will keep turnin' an' yeh kin pint an' direct hit any way yeh want hit t' go; an' yeh don't need no whip t' make hit travel good an' fast. When yeh've been runnin' an animal fur some time an' hit gits tired an' hot, hit may git mad an' turn on yeh, an' then yeh've somethin' t' do, fur with hits head lowered an' hits long hawns pintin' in the direction whar they'll do the most harm, hit will charge the hawse an' rider, an' they air lucky ef they both escape without gettin' hurt. A mad steer chargin' yeh calls fur all yehr 'tention, and ef yehr wise, yeh'll staht yehr hawse to'ard some place uv safety, an' yeh hed better use the spuhs tol'ably free an' make the pony hit the high places, cause one uv them steers kin run jest 'bout as fast as a good hawse, an' ef somethin' should happen so that yeh fell, yeh might hev a interestin' time tryin' t' coax that steer t' settle without a fight, but ef hit should keep up the fight t' the finish yeh would shoahly come out secon' best.

"I was down on the Red riveh bottoms last yeah, an' foun' a big steer 'bout ten yeahs ole that wuz wildeh than a antelope. Hit had a large pair uv hawns that twisted and curved aroun' two ur three times, an' each hawn wuz 'bout foah feet long. I picked out this steer an' stahted in t' separate hit from the rest uv the cattle, an' I finally cut hit out an' stahted t' drive hit down the prairie bottom t' a bunch uv steers 'bout three miles away that we wuz goin' t' take t' the herd that night down at the corral. I hed been runnin' hit good an' plenty an' seed that hit wuz purty hot an' gittin' considerably riled. Suddenly hit concluded t' drive me a while; hit turned on me, an' I could see fire flashin' from hits eyes; an' believin' hit wuz a good time fur me t' run I turned my pony an' stahted fur the bluffs 'bout half a mile away. The steer wuz jest at my pony's heels, hits hawns 'bout three feet from the hawse, an' I tell yeh, Jim, that wuz as nigh a tie race as eveh I run. The pony wuz runnin' fur deah life an' strainin' eveh nerve to git away from them hawns, but hit couldn't gain an inch on the steer, so I drawed my revolver, aimin' t' shoot hit an' in this way end the race. Holdin' the gun in my right han' I reached back'ard so's t' git a good shot an' wuz jest pressin' a little on the triggeh when my pony fell flat on the ground, rolled oveh an' got up without a scratch. I went down without firin' my revolver, an' as I started t' raise t' my feet the steer struck me with hits head an' knocked me flat agin', an' without stoppin' t' ask ef I wuz hurt hit kep' on goin' fur the high prairie. I jumped on my broncho an' stahted afteh hit, an' oveh'takin' the steer on the open ground I driv hit t' the little bunch uv cattle that the boys wuz holdin' fur us. When we reached the corral with our cattle that evenin' this blamed steer seemed t' hev some scruples 'bout goin' into a corral through a narrow gate, but as the boys had hit surrounded on three sides an' the gate wuz on the other side hit looked like easy money, bettin' that the steer would hev to go in the pen. Hit waited 'till all the otheh steers had gone in an' then hit turned an' come toward the smallest hawse an' rider, thinkin' that was the weakest link in the chain, an' by hoky! Jim, with one powe'ful jump hit went clean oveh the hawse an' stahted on a run fur freedom an' hits ole grazin'-grounds on the Red riveh bottoms. The boys, thinkin' hit hed earned hits liberty, didn't try t' bring hit back.

"Yeh've seed the corrals that we drive the cattle into t' hole oveh night, when we are gatherin' up a herd uv cattle fur the market. Yeh know they are made good an' strong, out uv logs 'bout twenty feet long, laid up into a pen, worm fashion, an' all the corners staked good an' plenty, an' the logs notched so they'll fit down smooth. In this way a corral is made so strong that no one animal kin break hit down, but when yeh git a whole herd uv these steers in thar an' they conclude t' stampede, yeh hed jest as well open the gates, fur they'll knock that fence down jest like hit wuz made uv straw.

"One day we gathered up 'bout a hundred and fifty head uv long-hawned, wild-eyed Brazos steers, that we cut out from among the buffler an' put 'em in a corral down on Trinity riveh. I wuz on guard that night, an' as the steers wuz kind uv restless like, an' the corral wuz not very stout, I didn't take the saddle off my pony, but jest let him feed along neah camp with eveh thing ready fur a quick race. Well, 'long close t' midnight, them steers stampeded in the corral an' knocked the fence down flat as a flitter, an' all uv 'em that didn't hev broken-legs wuz gone befoah yeh could tell what wuz goin' on. I wuz on my pony an' afteh 'em in a jiffy, an' yeh kin bet I didn't let any grass grow undeh my pony's feet fur 'bout foah miles, when I overtook 'em, an' ridin' 'long by the side uv the steers I tried t' reach the front uv the herd an' gradually press the leaders so they would begin t' turn. I wuz urgin' my hawse t' hits best licks, an' while watchin' the cattle I didn't look carefully at the lay uv the ground in front uv me, an' suddenly I felt my pony make a jump an' then I thought hit had furgot t' light agin; then I wuz locoed fur a good long time, an' when I got back my senses I wuz lyin' on the grass close t' my pony, an' hit wuz on hits back in a little ravine, and couldn't git up. I went t' he'p the hawse, an' by a little work got hit turned so hit could git on to hits feet. The pony wusn't hurt, but the saddle wus broke up consid'ably. Lookin' up at the bluff we hed jumped oveh, I seed hit wus more'n twenty feet high, an' the hawse hed turned oveh and lit on hits back. The ravine made a sharp turn heah, an' the cattle, which wus t' the right uv me, had jest missed the bluff, an' wus now clean out uv sight and hearin', an' I rid back t' camp feelin' like I hed got a whole lot the wust uv that deal."

And having concluded his narrative, Sandy walked away, leaving Jim to ponder on the adventures incident to the new life he had adopted.

CHAPTER XI.

INCIDENTS ABOUT THE RANCH.

Wild turkeys could be found in great numbers in Texas, along the rivers and smaller streams where there was timber sufficient to hide and protect them, for the wild turkey is a timid fowl and will seldom get out into the open country or away from places where it can secrete itself. The boys at the ranch were one day talking of wild turkeys, when Sandy declared that he knew of a place where they congregated at nights to roost, and that by going there any night one could in a very short time kill as many as was desired.

Jim heard this conversation, and questioned Sandy particularly about the location of the roost, and other facts that would enable him to find it; and one night he took the old double-barreled shotgun and started after the turkeys. He had determined to make the other boys happy by bringing them some nice fat fowls. He slipped away from camp, unobserved, as he supposed, intending to surprise the boys with the birds, early in the morning.

On arriving at the grove designated by Sandy as "the roost," he cautiously made his way through the brush, briers, and brambles, until he arrived at the open wood, and there, sure enough, up in the tops of the tall trees he could plainly see his game. Sitting on the limbs in great numbers, they did not show any signs of alarm at his approach, but permitted him to get within shooting distance, without the slightest note of warning from any of them. The moon was shining brightly, without a cloud to obstruct its rays, and Jim was elated at the prospect of good shooting before him. Finding a place where he could get a rest for his gun, he aimed at the nearest bird and fired, and had the supreme joy of seeing it tumble off the limb and fall to the ground. He then fired shot after shot, bringing down a bird at each shot, until he was satisfied that he had killed more than he could carry home. He approached the nearest bird and lifted it from the ground where it had fallen, looked at it critically for a moment, then held it up in the moonlight and took another good long survey of it, and threw it down on the ground in disgust,—for it was a buzzard! Sandy had steered him up against a buzzard-roost, and he had killed more than a dozen of them. Jim knew that he had been sold, and registered a vow that he would get even with the boys who had played this joke upon him.

When he returned to the ranch he found the boys all up and waiting for him, and it cost him a month's salary to square accounts with them. Sandy told him that any chump ought to know the difference between a turkey and a buzzard on the roost, because the buzzard would sleep with its head drooping low on its breast, but the turkey always held its head erect and pointing towards the heavens. Jim was willing to concede this fact, but said he did not care to make any more investigations, for he did not believe he could ever learn to relish buzzard-meat.

The Mexican wild hogs, or javelins as they are sometimes called, are numerous in some parts of Texas, but they are an animal of little use, for their flesh is tough and not fit for food; but there was another kind of wild hogs, descendants of tame swine that had wandered away and become genuine wild hogs. These animals would get fat feeding on pecans and other nuts in the fall and early winter, and then were excellent food.

Passing through a grove of timber one day, Jim saw a nice young hog start up in front of him, and by a well-directed shot brought it down. After preparing it in a hunter-like manner for food, he hung it up on a tree with its head down and about four feet from the ground. Thinking this was enough elevation to protect the hog from wolves, Jim started for the ranch to procure a wagon and team with which to haul it home. When he returned just before dark he heard a regular pandemonium of yells, howls and growls, proceeding from the spot where he had left the hog, and investineveh git away alive. My teeth wus chatterin' like a Greaser with the ager, an' all night long that cole wind kep' blowin', an' all night long my wild broncho kep' rearin', an' plungin', an' tryin' t' git away, but I hung t' the lariat, an' I believe that the exercise the pony give me wus what saved me from freezin' that night, an' I'm powe'ful shoah that I neveh suffered with the cold in my whole life as much as I did that time."

CHAPTER XIV.

"POKER JACK." X

In the early days, along the frontier towns, draw poker was the favorite game of chance, and the cowboys rarely came to town without indulging in this amusement. These games were usually played perfectly fair, for it was dangerous business to attempt to cheat, as the man trying to do so, if caught, would forfeit his life. There were, however, some professional gamblers who journeyed from one town to another, fleecing the cowboys and others with whom they played. Chief among these gamblers was a man named Jack Baxter, or "Poker Jack," as he was generally called. He was a tall, slender man, with keen, restless eyes, and his supple fingers were long and slender and by constant practice had become so quick and accurate in the manipulation of the cards that he could deceive even professional gamblers. He dressed well, and his manners were so smooth, suave and gentle that he readily gained the confidence of strangers. He had the reputation of being the nerviest gambler in the country, was quick with his gun and unerring in his aim; had killed several men, and was an all-round "bad man" and tough character.

Baxter drifted into Gainesville one time, and at the hotel met Bill and Sandy, who had stopped there for the night. He was so polite and friendly that they were favorably impressed with him, and after supper strolled down the street and entered a saloon, in the rear of which there was a poker game going, with several stockmen playing. Baxter asked permission to join them, which was readily granted, and he and Sandy each bought a stack of chips and began playing in the game. Bill stood by idly watching the sport until a peculiar movement of Baxter's fingers attracted his attention. From that time forward he watched intently, but in such a way as not to attract notice. In a short time he became thoroughly convinced that Baxter was cheating the other players.

Bill was determined that his friends should not be robbed, and to prevent it purchased some chips and sat down in the game, on the opposite side of the table from Baxter. The cards had been running low, with but a few pairs and no sensational features, when a "jack pot" which had been "sweetened" several times was "opened" by Bill for ten dollars. The man on his left side "stayed," and Baxter, who was dealing, also put in his money and took cards. Bill called for three cards and caught an ace, making three aces in his hand; the next player took two cards and Baxter took one. Bill "checked" the bet; the man on his left bet ten dollars, and Baxter bet twenty-five dollars better. Bill called the last bet and the other man "stayed out."

"Three aces," called Bill.

"I have a spade flush," said Baxter, and spreading the cards on the table he reached for the chips with both hands; at the same time he raised his eyes toward Bill and saw the latter pointing a frontier revolver directly at his heart, with one finger gently pressing the trigger.

Bill, with a cool but dangerous smile upon his lips, speaking in a gentle voice, said: "Don't move, Baxter; for if you do, this gun might go off."

Baxter was a brave man, but he well knew that the slightest movement on his part would mean instant death; he therefore wisely obeyed the injunction to remain perfectly quiet.

"Gentlemen," said Bill, addressing the players, "this fellow has been cheating all night. I have watched him ever since he began to play, but I could not interfere so long as I was not in the game; I therefore took a hand to stop his stealing. If you will look on the floor under his feet, you will find a number of cards that he has dropped after taking the one he needed out of the deck. In the last play, after drawing to a "bob-tailed flush" and failing to help his hand, he stole the eight of spades from the deck and dropped the other card into his lap."

"By hoky!" ejaculated Sandy, "let me pull his gation disclosed a pack of wolves surrounding it. They had eaten the head and shoulders of the hog and were rearing upon their hind legs trying to reach the flesh that was still higher up. Some of them would run and leap up and fasten their teeth in the flesh of the hog and only relinquish their hold when pulled down by the force of gravity. They were fighting with each other and making the woods ring with their hideous and frenzied howls, a picture that fully depicted the ravenous instincts of these animals. Jim fired a shot and the wolves ran away, but they left him only a small portion of the hog.

There was an old colored man at the ranch who did the chores around the house, and was a great favorite with the boys because he was always good-natured and willing to perform any work asked of him. His name was Dick, and if he had ever had another one it had got lost in the shuffle and Dick had forgotten it. He was afraid of the dark and of the Indians, and they had many a laugh at his expense by giving him a scare at imaginary Indians at night. One day Dick had to go to a grove a quarter of a mile distant, to bring up some timber for repairing the corral. He went very reluctantly, insisting that some one should accompany him to protect him from the Indians should any happen along, but it was not convenient for anyone to go with him that day, and so Dick harnessed the mules and prepared to start.

"Ef yeh see any Injuns, all yeh hev t' do are t' jump behin' a tree an' pint the handle uv yehr axe at' em," said Sandy, "an' they'll keep out uv the game with yeh, fur theh will think yehr pintin' a gun at 'em, an' a Comanche are skeered uv a man behin' a tree with a gun."

Dick arrived safely at the grove and was loading some timber onto his wagon, when upon looking out over the prairie-bottom he discovered three Indians coming directly toward him. Without a moment's hesitation, Dick dropped the timber from his hands, left the mules standing, and started for the house, running with all of the force and speed at his command. He landed there safe and sound, fell over the fence into the yard, and was soon safely hid in the basement. The Indians did not pursue him, but continued on their way up the river.

After Dick had become tranquil and his nerves had a chance to get back to their normal state, Sandy said to him, "Dick, did yeh follow my advice an' pint the axe-handle at the Injuns?"

"N-o," replied Dick, "I didn't pint no axe-handle at 'em; I pinted my heels at 'em, dat's what I pinted at 'em."

On one occasion Jim and Sandy stopped at a farmhouse in the Cross Timbers to get their dinners. The farmer's wife was young, handsome, apparently neat and clean, and the cowboys were congratulating each other upon their good luck in finding such a nice place to get a meal.

They were waiting patiently for the food to be prepared, when the young wife, who was doing the cooking, passed through the room where they were sitting. She had a hickory stick in her mouth, chewing one end of it, and stopped before the old, broad fireplace, and spat a mouthful of tobacco-juice into the fire, and then continued her work. The stick she carried in her mouth was about five inches in length, one-fourth of an inch in diameter, and one end had been split into fine slivers and chewed until it was soft and pliable, forming a fairly good wooden toothbrush.

"I see she chaws terbacker like the tar-heels at home," said Jim; "but I kaint savvy wat she wants t' chaw that blamed stick fur, nohow."

"No, she don't chaw terbacker," said Sandy; "that air's snuff that yeh see her spittin' out uv her mouth. She carries hit in a little tin box, an' when she wants t' use hit, she dips the brush end uv that air stick in the box, an' then rubs the stuff onto her teeth. Lots uv the women down heah use snuff in this way; they call hit usin' dip. Hit's fashionable with some uv the women, but ef eveh I git a gal, she'll hev t' cut that out."

"I hev seed lots uv women up ouh way carry a twist uv long green an' bite hit off like a mule would bite a cawn-stalk," said Jim, "an they kin chaw an' spit as good as a man; but I neveh seed anybody hev hit groun' up like meal an' eat hit with a stick befoah."

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD PECAN TREE.

A large pecan tree, with a wide-spreading top and long limbs stretching out in all directions, is probably still standing near the river just south of Gainesville, Texas. Bill and Sandy were riding down the river one day, and stopped beneath the shady branches of this tree to rest their ponies.

Sandy gazed long and intently at the limbs above his head, and then said: "Some trees hev experiences an' some hev a hist'ry jest like people. Now that tree hev hed the most wonderful hist'ry uv any tree in the whole world."

"Why do you make that assertion, and how is it true?" asked Bill. "I can see nothing strange about the tree."

"Well," said Sandy, "some trees hev hel' up a man t' be hung, an' some hev hel' up two, three, and mebby more; but no tree hev hel' up as many at one time as that ole pecan tree."

"Tell me all about it, Sandy," said Bill.

"Well," continued Sandy, "one time durin' the wah thar wus a lot uv fellers in the ole jail up town that wus charged with bein' agin the South an' fur the North. They hed been picked up from all oveh the country, an' hed been held thar fur a long time, an' hit took a good many men t' guard the jail an' keep 'em all safe; so one day along comes a felleh with some stripes on his shouldehs—I fergit his name —but he lived down the riveh heah somewhar, an' he took charge uv the prisoners, and purty soon he got tired uv feedin' an' guardin' 'em, so he said: 'Wat's the use uv feedin' an' guardin' them fellehs any longer? They belong on tother side, an' hit's our duty t' kill 'em.'

"Well, shuah enough, he took them fellehs down t' the creek heah, an' brought along some bed-cords an' otheh ropes, an' hung the whole outfit right up in this heah tree. Thar wus sixty-five of 'em, an' they could scacely find room enough t' tie the ropes, an' the fellehs that wus hung wus powe'fully crowded fur breathin'-room. That is why I said hit hed the most wonderful hist'ry uv any tree in the whole world."

"Sandy, are you trying to weave a romance to me, or are you telling me of an actual occurrence?" asked Bill.

"Hit air true as gospel, an' any uv the ole settlers heah will tell yeh the same," replied Sandy.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NORTHER.

"Jim, did yeh eveh git ketched out in a Texas norther?" asked Sandy, as they were one day discussing Texas weather.

"No," said Jim.

"Well now, Jim, yeh'll neveh know jest what freezin' means ontil yeh hev one tussel with them northers. Yeh may be out on the range some hot day, when yeh are in yehr shirt-sleeves an' the rays uv the sun are comin' down the neah way, an' yeh are prayin' fur a shade an' lookin' fur a drink uv wateh, an' wishin' yeh wuz up in Alaska, when yeh'll see that hit is jest a little hazy ur smoky in the northwest, ur mebby hit will be due north, an' befoah yeh hev time to make a break fur shelter the blizzard will hit yeh. The fust blast will go clean through yeh. Yehr teeth will begin t' chatter an' yeh'll git a bigger hustle on yehrself than yeh eveh did in all yehr life befoah. The longer hit blows the colder hit gets, an' yeh'll shoahly think yehr freezing t' death. Hit may not last more'n half an hour, but yeh'll suffer more with the cold than yeh would in a whole winter in Greenland. Take my advice, Jim, an' always hev a flask uv whisky with yeh; when yeh see the hazy smoke in the north, drink all the whisky at one time; take yehr saddle-blanket from yehr pony's back, wrap up in hit an' lay down somewhar so the wind kaint strike yeh much, an' stay thar 'till the norther is gone.

" 'Bout the worst norther that eveh struck me wuz out on the Little Wichita riveh, two yeahs ago. I got lost from the rest uv the boys an' couldn't fin' the camp, an' I had rid 'til dark, thinkin' I would fin' the trail. I wuz right out in a country whar thar was not a bush ur stick uv wood in a hundred mile, an' the land wuz as flat an' level as a pancake, without any wind-breaks to check the force uv a wind-storm. I fust noticed the storm comin' befoah I hed concluded t' go into camp, an' when I fust heard the wind whistle, I got off uv my hawse an' tried t' make a wind-break uv hit, but the broncho would'nt stan' fur nothin' uv that kin', an' when the wind begin t' blow good an' strong an' colder 'n blazes, hit took all my strength t' hole my hawse an keep hit from breakin' away from me.

"Roun' an' roun' went me an' the pony, the wind blowin' harder and colder all the time, and the pony gettin' wus an' wus. My hands and fingers wuz so numb that I could'nt hole my lariat, an' so I hed t' wrap hit aroun' my arms t' keep that cussed pony from gettin' away from me, 'cause I knowed that ef I lost that pony, hit wuz a ten-t'-one shot I would fangs an' we kin all take a look at the cyads the critter hev drapped on the floah."

Sandy immediately disarmed Baxter, and as Bill had said, the stolen cards were found in his lap and on the floor, showing that he had been systematically stealing ever since he had joined in the game.

Bill then divided the money with the players, giving each one the amount he had put into the game, and also giving to Baxter the amount he originally possessed.

The ranchmen were very angry, and insisted upon getting a rope and hanging Baxter without further ceremony, but Bill and Sandy, by the aid of a few more conservative ones, persuaded them to let him escape, with the warning that if he ever came back to Gainesville he would certainly be hung. He was informed that a ten-minute limit would be given him in which to get out of town, and in less than half that time he had departed.

CHAPTER XV.

RESCUE OF MAY DYER.

Six months had passed since Lightfoot had been permitted to return to his tribe, and the cowboys had not heard from him; they supposed that he had forgotten them and also his promises of future friendship, and that they would never meet him again. Riding out upon Red river about fifty miles from the settlements, hunting cattle, they one day saw an Indian approaching them. His face was smeared with paint and he was dressed in the gaudy, fantastic costume of a Comanche warrior. He approached the cowboys in a friendly manner, making signs of peace and indicating a desire to speak with them.

The cowboys waited for him to approach, and as he came near, Sandy exclaimed, "By hoky! Bill, that air our Ponca friend, Lightfoot."

"Wat in blazes are yeh doin' dressed in them togs, with that war paint daubed on yehr face?" asked Sandy, addressing the Indian.

"Lightfoot been makin' heap big fool out of Comanche," replied the Indian.

"Yes, an' we come purty neah makin' a heap big fool out of a Ponca, fur Bill had a bead on yeh an' come mighty neah pullin' the triggeh, fur we thought yeh wuz a shoah-enough Comanch," said Sandy.

"Me been to Comanche camp on Washita river," said Lightfoot. "Comanche steal heap good pony from Ponca, and me go find um."

"Did yeh git the hawse?" asked Sandy.

"No, me no git um; warriors all gone to big medicine-dance in the hills an' take pony with um," replied the Indian. "Me been in Comanche camp an' warriors all gone; see heap squaw, heap pappoose, an' white squaw, too," said Lightfoot.

"Do you mean that the Comanches have a white girl a prisoner in their camp?" asked Bill.

"Yes; old squaws watch um white gal, no let um go," said the Indian.

The two cowboys were very much interested in Lightfoot's story of the captive white girl, and ascertaining from him that the Comanche camp was about two days' journey from them, and that the warriors would probably be away from camp for several days to come, they determined to make an attempt to release her.

"By hoky! Bill, let's make a raid on the camp an' bring the gal home with us," said Sandy.

"I will go with you; and we had better start immediately if we can rely upon the statements of our friend Lightfoot," said Bill.

"Me no tell um lie. White squaw in camp and want white men to bring her away. Me go 'long with you," said the Indian.

"No," replied Sandy, "we believe yehr tellin' us the truth. We'll go afteh the gal ourselves, an' we'll stay up thar ur bring her back with us."

Leaving the Indian to pursue his way back to his tribe, the two adventurous cowboys directed their course northwest toward the Indian village, and after two days' hard riding they came in sight of the Indian camp, situated on the Washita river, in a narrow valley, with high bluffs on either side. A careful reconnoiter convinced them that but few if any warriors were in the camp. After giving their ponies a good rest, they determined to make a bold dash into the village, and galloped up the valley and into the camp, heralded by the barking of innumerable dogs that fled as the cowboys approached. From the tepees poured forth a motley throng of dirty children and haggard, homely squaws. They gazed in amazement at the sight of two white men riding through the center of their camp. When about half-way through the straggling village, they saw a young girl running to meet them.

"Oh!" she cried, "I see you are white men; won't you take me away from this dreadful place?"

"By hoky! we come heah fur that purpose," said Sandy. "Give me yehr han'." Reaching down, he caught in his strong grasp the small hand that was stretched upward to him, and lifted the girl onto the pony behind the saddle. "Hol' on tight now," he cautioned her, and away they galloped down the valley, out of the camp toward home and safety.

Bill kept in the rear, ready to shoot anyone who attempted to resist them; but as no one appeared, he pressed forward and soon overtook Sandy and his fair charge.

"We'd better travel some consider'ble," said Sandy, "fur them red-skins may be back most any time, an' we'll shoahly hev t' fight good an' plenty ef they do."

"The Indian men are expected back from the hills to-day," said the girl.

"Ef that air the case, we've got the staht uv 'em, an' ef they do ketch us, they'll hev some interestin' news t' tell the folks when they git back home," replied Sandy.

"What is your name?" inquired Bill of the girl.

"May Dyer," was the reply.

"Well, by hoky!" exclaimed Sandy, "yehr the little gal the red-skins carried off from down on Elm creek in Texas. I'm tickled consider'ble t' help yeh git away from 'em, an' we'll take yeh home safe an' soun', an' don't yeh be skeered."

"Yes, I am the one," said May, "and you came just in time, for the Indians had decided that I should marry Big Buffalo, one of the warriors that killed my papa and mamma and all of the rest of our family but me. I have tried many times to escape, but they watched me so closely that I could never elude them, and I began to fear that I could not escape at all, but would have to live always with the Indians. Surely Providence must have sent and directed you at this time, for when the warriors were in camp it would have been impossible for you to rescue me."

"Well, yeh don't hev t' marry Big Buffler, nor t' stay in his camp no longer," said Sandy, "and the only thing he has got comin' will be a bullet-hole in his red skin ef he follers us."

They had traveled about three miles from camp, when they discovered some ponies grazing along the stream, herded by Indian boys. Sandy took his lariat and lassoed one of the ponies. He ran the lariat through the pony's mouth, making a bridle out of it, and mounted the animal, turning his own pony over to May. The new horse proved to be a good traveler, and they rode easily over the prairie, making good time because they were apprehensive that the Comanches might return and pursue them.

They had ridden until late in the afternoon, when Bill, who had been keeping a sharp look-out, saw a body of five Indians coming toward them, urging their ponies forward at full speed. Realising that the presence of the girl might hamper their movements in a fight, Sandy directed May to push forward due southeast.

"That hawse will carry yeh safe into Fort Arbuckle," he explained, "an' thar haint a hawse in the Injun country that kin ketch yeh, ef yeh will give hit the rein; yeh don't need no whip ur spuhs, fur hit will go so fast yeh kin hardly git yehr breath. We'll slow up an' accommerdate these heah fightin' bucks that air running' theah hawses t' death tryin' t' ketch us, an' then we'll jine yeh later, on the road ur in the Fort."

The girl, although loath to leave her rescuers, knew she would only be in their way and a detriment to them in a fight; therefore she turned in the direction indicated, bade the cowboys a sorrowful good-by, and started on her lonely journey. Knowing that Sandy's pony would take May safely into Fort Arbuckle, the cowboys felt relieved from this responsibility, and slackened their pace, waiting to entertain the warriors who were following them so furiously. When the Indians saw the cowboys would not run, but seemed ready for the attack, they apparently changed their minds, and, circling around to the right, were soon lost to view on the distant plains.

"Them ain't Comanches, but Cheyennes, an' I don't think they wuz lookin' fur us in particular," said Sandy.

The cowboys were now satisfied that they were not being pursued, and started in a brisk gallop to overtake May. She was soon sighted, and the boys signaled for her to wait for them to come up.

"Hit wuz a false alarm," said Sandy; "them wuz Injun hunters, an' when they seed we wuz not easy they turned an' left us."

Late that night the party arrived at Fort Arbuckle, and were kindly received by the soldiers at the post. May was cared for by the wife of an officer, and early next morning the party left the fort and were soon on Texas soil.

When Circle-Dot heard of the wonderful rescue, accomplished by her two cowboy friends, she was greatly elated, and immediately sought the girl and induced her to make her future home at the Circle-Dot ranch.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HORSE RACE.

Horse-racing was a favorite amusement with the cowboys, and they would often run races two or three days each week when they had plenty of leisure. Sandy was the owner of one of the fastest ponies in Texas, and was justly proud of the animal. It was a broncho, and was a long, loose-jointed, ungainly appearing thing, having pale-yellow sides and a black stripe along its back from the neck to the croup. There were small white dots all over its body, showing where the Texas tick had done its work. In fact, it was a very homely animal, and there was a sleepy, innocent look in its eyes that would deceive the most experienced cowboy, and without hesitation they would have pronounced it lazy and sluggish, without mettle or ambition. When you put the saddle on it, however, and took the bridle-reins in your hands and put your foot in the stirrup, it would at once dispel any illusions you might entertain about its sluggishness. Only a good rider could retain his seat after having mounted the pony, and it could run at a marvelous speed, as demonstrated on numerous occasions on the race-track.

THE HORSE RACE.

One day a boy from the Raven Ranch, situated about one hundred and twenty-five miles south, rode into the yard and inquired for Sandy, who went out to meet him.

"Are yeh the feller they call Sandy?" inquired the stranger.

"I reckon I'm 'bout the only feller in these parts that kin afford that name," replied Sandy.

"Hev yeh got a hawse that yeh claim to be a runnin' hawse?" asked the stranger.

"Well, I've got a hawse that kin go purty fast," said Sandy with some pride.

"We've got a hawse down t' the Raven Ranch that we believe kin outrun any hawse in Texas," asserted the stranger, "and the boys sent me up heah t' see ef yeh would make a race agin the Raven Pony."

"Ef yeh hev a hawse that kin run some, I'll make a race with yeh," replied Sandy, "but I don't run agin no plugs."

"I'll bet yeh a hundred dollahs that our pony kin beat yeh, an ef yeh will come down thar yeh kin git all the bets yeh want uv the same kin'," said the stranger.

"Now, sonny, that are easy money, an' I feel kinder shamed t' take hit," said Sandy, "an' I won't go down thar with yeh onless they are all growed-up people, fur hit will be like takin' candy from babies."

"Kin I take a look at yehr hawse?" asked the stranger.

"Uv course yeh kin," responded Sandy, leading him down to the corral and pointing out the pony.

"But I mean the hawse yeh wan't t' run agin us," said the stranger.

"That's the hawse," responded Sandy.

The cowboy from the Raven Ranch laughed in derision. "Why, we kin let that plug hev a staht uv a hundred yards an' then beat him," he said.

"I confess he ain't much fur looks," replied Sandy, "but befoah yeh git done with this race yeh will fin' he's got a powerful sight uv run in him."

"We will run one week from t' day ef yeh think yehr hawse kin travel down thar that quick," said the Raven boy.

"I'm willin' t' run at that time, an' ef I don't git down thar yeh kin keep the change," said Sandy.

Several of the Three-Bar boys accompanied Sandy down to the Raven Ranch, and the morning of the race they were out at the tracks bright and early, waiting for the sport to begin. First, the pony from the Raven Ranch was led out and critically examined. It was the picture of a perfect horse: jet black, its hair sleek and glossy, and its neatly formed limbs and elegant proportions called forth words of praise and admiration from all present. A stranger would have picked it for a winner without hesitation. Sandy's sleepy, lazy-looking pony did not favorably impress the cowboys from the rival ranch, and they began offering odds on the home pony. It was agreed that each pony should be ridden by its owner and the Three-Bar boys were elated, because no better rider than Sandy could be found in that country.

When the horses were led out to the track the betting began with renewed interest. Two to one, three to one, and finally five to one, was offered on the Raven pony. These bets were taken by Sandy and his friends until all of their money was gone, and then they bet their saddles, their revolvers and their ponies, and afterward had to let the other boys do the bluffing while they waited for the race.

When the owner of the black horse mounted and rode out on the track, a shout went up from the assembled crowd; hats were thrown up in the air, and such expressions of confidence in the Raven pony that Sandy's friends began to feel a trifle worried. Sandy then mounted, and it could be seen that he was at least fifty pounds heavier than the owner of the black horse, and this of course gave the advantage in weight to the other side.

The two cowboys rode up, and turned their horses onto the track about fifty yards from the starting-point. The two contestants galloped down the track at an even pace, but as they reached the starting-point the black horse was given the rein and forged to the front. For a short time it looked as if it was sure to win, for it had maintained its lead, and was running easily and smoothly. When the quarter was passed, Sandy's pony seemed to arouse from its lethargy, and when Sandy loosened the reins the pony tossed its head and shot forward with a magnificent burst of speed. Slowly the gap between the two horses was closed, and they were running neck-and-neck, but before reaching the home stretch the rider on the black horse, seeing the danger of losing the race, began to use his whip freely, and the little pony responded gallantly, but it was of no avail, for Sandy's pony continued gaining until the black horse was a full length in the rear. Running in this way they crossed the line, and Sandy's broncho had won the race. It was then and there voted the fastest horse in Texas, and was ever after the special pride of all of the cowboys in the surrounding country, and no amount of money could have purchased it.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADVENTURES OF AN EVENING.

The evening was so clear and bright, and so inviting for out-of-door exercise, that Circle-Dot could not resist the temptation to take a little canter on her favorite pony, Jack. She had the boy bring out the pony and was riding along at a slow pace, inhaling the delicious fragrance of the wild flowers that grew profusely along the road, and viewing with a critical eye the lovely scenery spread out before her, when her attention was attracted by the quick beat of a horse's hoofs on the road behind her, and upon looking back she discovered a horseman, who seemed intent on joining her. A second glance disclosed to her the fact that the approaching rider was her neighbor, Barnard Raymez.

"Good evening, Miss Circle-Dot," said he, as he rode up by her side. "I am extremely fortunate that I have found such agreeable company on my road this evening."

"Good evening, Mr. Raymez," said she. "I am not so certain that you can have my company for any part of your journey, for I doubt whether your horse can travel with Jack." And she laid her soft, white hand out over the pony's glossy mane.

"I think your horse is outclassed," she continued, "and I am sure I cannot afford to trudge along and keep pace with a second-rate horse."

"A challenge for a race, is it?" asked Raymez.

"Come on!" said Circle-Dot.

Giving their horses loose reins, they were soon going at a furious pace up the road. It took but a short time to demonstrate the fact that Raymez was defeated. Bushes, fences and trees were quickly passed. The dust from the dry road was filling the air in the rear, and Raymez was getting no small portion of it, and at every jump the little pony increased the distance between the riders. At last, seeing that he was defeated and without hope of recovery, Raymez, with a bitter feeling of anger and regret, pulled in his horse and was soon lost in the rear.

Circle-Dot was glad that Raymez was left behind, for she had disliked him ever since the night that he had acted so rudely when introduced to Bill and Sandy.

She soon came to a place where she left the main road, and following a path that wound around through the timber, she came to the modest little cabin which was the home of Joe Dingby and his estimable wife, Peggy.

The same evening, Joe Dingby with his dog had gone down through the timber looking for rabbits or other game that might be found, when the dog struck the trail of some animal, and the deep, loud roar that was music to Joe's ears resounded through the woods as the dog started off in pursuit. Joe started after him, following as fast as possible until he came to where it had located the quarry, up in a large tree. He saw on the top boughs of the tree an animal which at first he mistook for a raccoon, but closer investigation disclosed the fact that it was a wild-cat. Joe rested his squirrel-rifle on the limb of a near-by bush, took deliberate aim, and fired. At the crack of the rifle the wild-cat loosed its hold on the tree and fell to the ground. Joe rushed up to the animal and was about to pick it up, when the cat rose to its feet, its eyes blazing with fire, and started directly at him. Joe knew the animal was dangerous, and not having another load in his gun, he turned and started to run. The enraged cat pursued him closely, and just as he reached the tree from which it had fallen, fastened its teeth and claws in the rear part of his short coat. At the same time his faithful dog seized the wild-cat by the back and held to it desperately. Joe, holding to the tree, ran round and round it, pulling the wild-cat and dog with him.

"Sic him, Tige! shake 'im, Tige! eat 'im up!" yelled Joe as he continued to circle round the tree, pulling his heavy load of freight with him.

It was a long, hard race for Joe, but finally the combined weight of the wild-cat and the dog pulled the animal's teeth and claws loose from Joe's coat and he was liberated. He then seized a stick, and with the assistance of the dog the wild-cat was soon out of the fight.

A merry peal of laughter at this moment attracted his attention, and looking up he saw Circle-Dot, sitting on her pony a short distance away, and convulsed with mirth.

"Joe, it was good as a circus!" she cried. "I heard the shot and got here just in time to see the pretty race you were making around that old tree."

"Hit wuz a close call fur me," said Joe.

"Yes, and just imagine what a tussle there would have been if you had fallen while running around that tree," replied Circle-Dot.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SAND-STORM.

The great Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains, was "the cowboys' desert." Here they often suffered from thirst and hunger, and were frequently exposed to the sand-storms that are more oppressive than the sirocco of the Libyan desert. Some of the cowboys from the Three-Bar outfit were out upon this dry plain, with a small bunch of straggling cattle they had picked up, when they were elated by a gentle breeze from the south that was cool and refreshing. An hour later this wind had increased in velocity until it had almost reached the speed of a hurricane. The air was so full of sand that the rays of the sun were obstructed and reached the ground with a hazy glimmer, as they were reflected through this cloud of sand. The sharp grains were hurled through the air with such force that they would sting and cut the flesh wherever it was exposed. With their hats pulled down to protect their faces and their hands thrust into their pockets, the cowboys moved around in camp like blind men, carefully feeling their way before taking each step. Some were cursing and swearing, others were silent and morose, but all were ill at ease and utterably miserable.

An attempt to prepare the evening meal had proved a failure. There was sand in the coffee, sand in the bread, sand in the meat, sand in the sugar, sand in their eyes, sand in their ears, sand in their mouths, sand in their hair, sand in their pockets, sand in their shoes, sand in their handkerchiefs, sand in their blankets, sand in their wearing apparel, sand in their bedding, and sand down their backs. Sand, sand, sand, everywhere. They attempted to swallow coffee, and the sand scratched their throats; they attempted to chew bread or meat—the sand grated in their teeth. Still the wind continued to blow, the sand continued to fly, and no signs of relief appeared. The flying sand was rolling over the smooth plains, a white mass of crystals, that gleamed in the hazy light like a shimmering sea.

"By hoky! we've got t' move the tent," said Sandy, "fur the blasted sand is driftin' up oveh the top uv hit."

Sandy was right; a drift of three feet or more had already accumulated, and in a short time would bury it beneath a mountain of sand.

"Move the hawses an' cattle aroun' an' keep 'em goin'," said Sandy, "fur ef they stan' still a minute, they'll all be buried so deep that they kaint neveh be foun' on Resurrection mawnin."

All night the men, ponies and cattle kept moving from place to place to prevent these sand-drifts; for when a drift was once started by even a slight obstruction, it would accumulate, even after the first cause was removed, and make a mountain of sand where before was a smooth, level plain.

Next morning the wind ceased to blow, and the sand had settled back on the earth, but the cowboys were so dirty they could not endure their clothing; they therefore took a respite, for washing and cleaning. The water was impregnated with alkali and was almost void of cleansing power. Sandy finally went down by the banks of the river and dug up a weed that had a long, thick root, which he mashed into a pulp and placed in their basin of water. They could then make a perfect lather, and found that they could cleanse their flesh and clothing almost as well as they could with soap.

"This," said Sandy, "are the soap-weed ur yucca plant, which hev been used by the Injuns all theah lives fur cleanin' up when they felt like hit hed t' be done, which haint very often. The Comanche Injuns also use hit fur helpin' t' tan buffler-robes. Yeh know that the buffler-robes tanned by the Comanche Injuns are wuth moah than half a dozen robes tanned by other Injuns. One uv theah robes will keep soft and pliable all the time. Yeh kin lay hit in the wateh all night, an' when hit gits dry, hit'll be jest as soft an' nice as hit wuz befoah. Everybody that hev owned one uv these robes wants t' know how they tan 'em, but that is a secret the Comanche won't give up. I hev seed 'em at work tannin' robes, an' I know that soap-weed is one uv the things they use on 'em."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MIRAGE.

A few mornings after the sand-storm, as the outfit were preparing breakfast, Jim startled them by pointing toward the sky, and in a loud voice exclaiming, "Looky thar! looky thar!"

They all looked as directed, and saw up in the heavens what appeared to be a drove of buffalo, running as if in a stampede. As they took their long swinging lope each individual animal could be plainly distinguished, so clear, vivid and perfect was the picture. There were a large number of them, traveling toward the southwest. The cowboys watched this peculiar phenomenon for a long time, and until the picture gradually faded away.

"What in the devil wus that?" asked Jim.

"That," said Sandy, "wus a mirage."

"An' what are a mirage?" asked the other.

"A mirage is when yeh see somethin' that haint thar," replied Sandy. "They are a funny thing, an' give some people the shivers, 'cause they 'low that hit allus brings bad luck, an' that are why they git leary an' skeered when they see 'em. This one wuz a gran' sight, an' yeh will only see one like that in a lifetime. The fust one I eveh seed wuz down on the Rio Grande, mor'n five years ago. Hit wuz a town, jest a lot uv 'dobe houses, like a Mexican town, but thar wuz one house that wuz purty big an' looked like hit might be made uv stone. Hit had a tall steeple an' a cross on top uv hit, an, looked jest like a church-house. Some uv the boys 'lowed this town wuz the New Jerusalem hit looked so quar up thar in the sky. I figured howeveh that the New Jerusalem wouldn't be all 'dobe houses, an' so they had to drap that idea. We thought 'bout hit consider'ble, but we neveh could figure out how that town got up thar in the sky nor what hit wuz put up thar fur.

"Well, the next time I seed one uv the blamed things wuz out heah on these plains. We hed been out uv wateh fur a long time, an' wuz all very nigh played out, when one mawnin' we seed a big lake right close t' camp, and the wateh wuz a-ripplin', an' the waves wuz a-rollin', an' hit all looked powerful good t' us, fur hit had been a long time since we had a good drink.

"We all broke into a run to git to the lake, but hit moved away an' we follered, an' hit jest kept a little ways ahead uv us, an' we run till we wuz all tired out an' hed t' sit down an' rest. Afteh the sun had got up a little higheh, we seed hit wuz no lake at all, but jest one uv them everlastin' deceivin' mirages."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BUFFALO.

The winter home of the buffalo was the Llano Estacado, where they would graze during the winter months and in the spring start to feed along over the plains, traveling many hundred miles north; but in the fall of the year they would turn their course southward, and a large majority of them would finally reach the Staked Plains, although, during the coldest seasons of the year many of them would be scattered along all of the way from Texas to the British Possessions. But few people have an adequate conception of the vast numbers of these animals that annually fed over the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. The Indians killed them only when in need of meat, and when they had acquired a sufficient quantity for present use they would stop the slaughter until hunger again compelled them to go on the hunt. They considered the buffaloes their property, created by the Great Spirit for their special benefit, and were always angry at white men who attempted to hunt and kill these animals. When railroads were built across the plains and grazing-grounds of the buffaloes, a new market was created for their robes, and white men rushed into the country and the great slaughter began, which ended only when the last of the wild ones in this country were killed. Before that time there had been no concerted action to slay them, and they were comparatively exempt from slaughter by the whites except such as were occasionally killed by straggling hunters. The wealth of their robes, however, induced many men to forsake other employment and join in the great hunt, which was both exciting and remunerative, for sometimes a single hunter would kill more than one hundred of them in a day. After the skins were removed from the animals the carcasses were left to mould and rot upon the plains, and such great numbers of them were slain that they could be counted by the thousands as they lay scattered over the range. There was probably never such a great slaughter and sacrifice of animal life since man has usurped the right to control the destinies of all other animals. Viewing this slaughter from a humane standpoint, it looks cruel and deserving of censure; but the practical result was that the killing of these animals did more in two years to subdue and civilize the Indians of the plains than had been accomplished by the Government in that line in the past hundred years. When the buffaloes were all killed the Indians were compelled by hunger to capitulate and receive food and protection from the Government, and have in a few short years been changed from wild, warlike, bloodthirsty savages to peaceable agriculturists.

After the great slaughter had ceased, the early settlers in the middle and western parts of Kansas and Nebraska would drive out upon the plains and gather up buffalo-bones and bring them to the nearest points on the different railroads, where there was a ready market for them at about five dollars per ton. At all of these stations there would be great piles of bones awaiting shipment. The buyers would have the bones unloaded along the railroad track, and frequently piles of them more than half a mile in length could be seen ridged up as high as they could be pitched from the wagons. The shipping of these bones from their native plains was the last act in that drama which extinguished the wild bison from the United States.

When the buffaloes would feed south in the winter, they could be seen in larger droves than when feeding north in the summer, because here they would congregate and wait for spring before starting north again.

Bill and Sandy were riding over the Staked Plains one day, when they came upon a herd of buffaloes that were quietly feeding over the range. The ground was perfectly level, with nothing to obstruct the vision for many miles, and as far as could be seen the country was black with buffaloes.

"How many buffaloes are in this drove?" inquired Bill.

"Well," said Sandy, "I don't know how many a million is, but I'd guess thar wuz a million uv 'em. They are feedin' along quietly, right in our road, so let's ride through the herd, an' by the time we git through hit mebby yeh'll agree with me 'bout the number."

"But won't we cause a stampede by trying to ride through the herd?" asked Bill.

"No," replied Sandy; "I'll show yeh how t' go through 'em without causin' a panic. Ef we ride quietly along, the nearest buffler will hop off out uv the way, an' when hit sees yehr not goin' t' hurt hit, will stop an' go t' feedin' agin. In this way they'll jest open up a lane fur us t' ride through an' close hit up behin' us as fast as we pass. Uv course, ef we should make a racket an' git 'em excited, thar might be a stampede an' we wouldn't last 'til we wuz half gone; but ef yeh'll foller me an' do as I tell yeh, thar'll be no danger. I'd rutheh trust 'em any day than a herd of them Brazos steers."

They directed their course toward the center of the herd, and the nearest buffaloes ran off a short distance on either side, making an opening about a half mile in width. As the cowboys continued to advance, the buffaloes gave way before them, forming a veritable lane with buffaloes on either side. They continued to ride in this way, going at medium pace, for more than forty miles, as they estimated it, and during that whole distance they were riding through this herd of buffaloes, and nowhere could they see an opening or break, but on every hand the plains were covered with these animals in numbers apparently beyond computation.

"How many bufflers do yeh say thar is in that herd now?" inquired Sandy.

"I don't know how many a billion is," replied Bill, "but I would guess that there are more than a billion."

CHAPTER XXI.

WOLVES ATTACK CATTLE.

Looking for cattle along the Washita river, on one occasion, Bill and Sandy witnessed a rare example of animal intelligence and devotion to their young. They saw in the distance a bunch of cattle acting in a strange manner, and upon riding nearer they quickly discovered the cause of the commotion. The cattle were huddled up together, forming a complete circle, with their heads toward the outer rim. In the center of this circle were the young calves and all the weaker cattle, while on the outside were the large, strong animals. Circling around this herd of cattle was a large pack of buffalo-wolves, snapping, snarling, and howling. These fierce animals were running around and around, seeking a vulnerable point where they could break the guard, but on every side they were met by that glistening wall of horns. Occasionally some one of the wolves, made desperate by hunger, would attempt to break through the line, only to be impaled upon the sharp horns and gored to death by the angry cattle. Still another one would venture too close, and before it could retreat would be caught on the long horns and tossed in the air, killed or crippled. The wolves were large and ferocious; many a one of them could, when urged by hunger, kill a grown animal in a few seconds, and were dangerous antagonists to encounter.

For fully an hour the wolves continued their frantic attack, trying to disperse the herd, but trained soldiers never met the charge of an enemy with more bravery, nor hurled them back more successfully, than did these wild cattle of the plains. Thinking the encounter had lasted long enough, the cowboys drew their revolvers and rushed upon the wolves, firing at them rapidly as they advanced, but before they reached the herd the wolves had broke and fled. The cattle, too, were alarmed, and seeing that their enemies, the wolves, had disappeared, they also broke ranks and fled scattering over the prairie, leaving the field of battle in the possession of Bill and Sandy.

"How do the cattle know they are going to be attacked by wolves in time to enable them to form this strategical battle-circle?" asked Bill.

"They hain't no way uv knowin' hit aforehan'," responded Sandy. "Hit are this a-way, yeh see: the wolves are out on a hunt, an' when they sees a bunch uv cattle feedin' on the range, they slip along 'til they see a calf out a little ways from the herd, an' they make a run fur hit; ef they git a good hold uv the throat, hit nevah gits no chance t' holler, an' they'll clean the bones uv meat in plain sight uv the cattle, that keep on feedin' without noticin' the critters. But ef the calf hollers, the stuff's off then, fur the whole herd rushes t' the spot an' forces the wolf t' give way an' let go hits hold. The cattle then form this ring right away, an' yeh seed yehrself what kin' uv a fight they kin put up."

"I have read of wolves attacking travelers in the far north," said Bill, "but I never before knew that they were ferocious enough to attack a drove of Texas cattle. The skill and bravery with which these cattle protect their young and resist the savage attack of these wolves is wonderful, and displays a greater degree of intelligence than I supposed the bovine possessed. It certainly exemplifies the old adage, that self-protection is the first law of Nature."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLACK 'DOBE.

"Greasers are a powerful oncertain kin' uv people, an' the moah yeh see uv 'em the less yeh know uv 'em," mused Sandy during one of his long rides with Jim. "I 'spose thar is some uv 'em yeh kin trust, but fur my part I've been onfort'nate in not findin' any uv the critters with that bran' on 'em. I've had the misfortune t' run up agin some uv the bad 'uns thet hev drifted t' this country, an' my min' may be somewhat prejudiced agin 'em. Some fellers 'ud tell yeh that Greasers is all cowards, but that is shorely a mistake. They may be a little leary 'bout goin' up agin a gun, but yeh give that same Greaser a knife an' he 'll fight yeh longer an' harder than a wild-cat. They kin throw a knife a heap straighter than some fellers kin shoot, an' one uv them long bowies will go clean through a man. I've seed 'em throw a knife an' stick hit in a tree so fur that yeh could scarcely pull hit out. At a fandango when one uv 'em gits mad ur jealous, yeh neveh know hit 'till he slips one uv them knives 'tween some feller's ribs an' yeh see the blood spurtin' roun' oveh the floor.

"Two yeahs ago I wuz down t' our ranch above

Brownsville whar the cattle ranged along up an' down the Rio Grande, an' we wuz missin' a heap uv our steers, an' we 'lowed the Greasers wuz a stealin' uv 'em an' drivin' em oveh into Mexico. Seventy-five miles from us down on the Lacato, in Mexico, wuz a hacienda whar a heap uv cattle wuz kept in charge uv some peons, an' hit wuz ginerally understood that the most uv these cattle wuz stole from Texas. In the winteh when the wateh in the riveh wuz low, the Greasers would swim their hawses oveh to the Texas side an fin' some steers not fur from the riveh an' gather up a bunch uv 'em, sometimes four or five uv 'em together, an' force 'em into the riveh, an' when the steers got t' wateh that wuz deep enough t' swim 'em they would pull for the otheh side, for a steer will neveh turn 'roun' while swimmin'. Some uv the thieves would take charge uv 'em when they landed, an' when they had a good bunch they would pull out with 'em fur the hacienda.

"One mawnin' I got word from a friendly Greaser that some uv our cattle had been tuck across the riveh an' wuz bein' driv' t' the Lacato. I stahted afteh 'em, strikin' their trail in the sand-bottoms an' follerin' hit oveh the ridge across a barren country, whar yeh couldn't see nothin' but centepedes an' cactus. I hed consider'ble trouble keepin' the trail through heah, but afteh a while hit led down into a canyon, with steep rocky bluffs on each side an' a stream of wateh tricklin' along at the bottom of hit. I follered the trail down this canyon all day, an' at dark wus lookin' 'roun' fur a place t' camp, knowin' that I could strike the trail agin in the mawnin'. Hit wus plum dark when I foun' a place that suited me an' I wus jest takin' off my saddle when the broncho begin to act like thar wus somebody else in the canyon. I put the saddle back on my hawse an' led hit t' a bunch uv chaparral an' left hit thar. I noticed a break in the steep bluffs uv the canyon right heah, an' steppin' 'round keerfully I saw a 'dobe house up on a little mesa t' the right. The doah wuz standin' wide open an' a bright light streamin' out. Thinkin' I hed foun' a place whar I could bunk fur the night, I walked up t' the house, when by the glimmer uv the stahlight I could see that hits color wuz almost jet black, an' I knowed I wuz standin' in front uv the 'Black 'Dobe,' a place notorious as the headquarters of Mexican banditti.

"I would hev got away from thar, but onfort'nately I hed been diskivered, an' a gruff voice from within tole me t' enter. I hev went in t' a whole lot uv tough places, but that wuz the limit. I foun' three uv the ornriest-lookin' thugs inside that I eveh hed the pleasure uv meetin'. They hed murdeh an' robbery writ all oveh theah faces as plain as print t' me. Befoah I could speak t' 'em some one from the outside slammed the doah shut an' the Greasers each drawed long, sharp-pointed bowie-knives, an' I naturally took one uv my six-shooters out uv my belt an' helt hit not pintin' toward anyone in particular, but easy t' turn in the direction whar hit would do the most good. No talkin' wuz necessary, fur hit wuz plain that them Greasers wuz lookin' fur trouble. I would hev been glad t' run ef thar hed been any chance, but the doah wuz the only outlet from that room, an' hit wuz tight shut, an' two uv the Greasers got between me an' hit and the otheh one struck the sheep-tallow lamp, that wuz blazin' up good an' plenty, and knocked hit out, leavin' us in the dark. I figured that thar would be somethin' doin' purty quick, an' I want t' tell yeh, Jim, that the cold chills chased up an' down my back when I knowed that I wuz in that room with three robbers armed with knives who wuz determined t' kill me befoah the doah wuz opened agin. I expect I wuz a little dazed, fur I stood in the same place ontil I felt a knife ticklin' me in my left side.

"I jumped away, an' at the same time fired my revolver in the direction the lick come from, an' then changed my position again, so they couldn't locate me by the flash uv my gun, an' then I hed one uv the most excitin' hunts I wuz eveh in; not blindly runnin' roun' in the room feelin' fur the Greasers, but steppin' easy as the tread uv a cat slippin' up on a bird. I moved along the 'dobe walls with my face frontin' the open room an' my arms extendin' on each side, a revolver in each han' an' my finger pressin' the triggehs, ready t' shoot quickeh 'n lightnin'. At fust I wuz powe'fully skeered, fearin' my han's would tetch a robber, but afteh we hed come togetheh a few times an' I hed got a number uv knife-wounds, my whole nature seemed t' change, an' I wuz reachin' out greedy like, hopin' all the time t' feel 'em. I felt like shoutin' t' 'em t' come on an' end the fight, but I reckoned that would give 'em the best uv hit an' so kep' still. As I kep' trailin' roun' that room, seconds seemed minutes an' minutes hours, an' still the death-hunt went on. Not a word wuz said nor a soun' heard, 'cept when we tetched each otheh, an' then the stab uv the knife an' the blaze uv my revolver which roared in that close room like the explosion uv a cannon. I kaint tell how long hit lasted; mebby hit wuz ten minutes an' mebby hit wuz two hours. I hed got seven knife-wounds an' wuz bleedin' plenty, but I couldn't tell what the Greasers hed got. The floor uv the room wuz slippery with blood; I could feel hit eveh move I made, an' I wuz gittin' powe'ful faint an' weak-like, an' knowed I couldn't stan' up much longer. At last I foun' myself up agin the doah, an' with a hard shove I pushed hit open an' stepped out into the open air, out uv that cussed black hole into light, fur the stahs wuz shinin' an' I could see objects neah me quite plain.

"Jim, I neveh in all my life enjoyed anything like I did the fresh air an' the stahlight that night when I got out uv the 'Black 'Dobe.' I stood back from the doah fur a short time, waitin' fur someone t' come out afteh me, but no one come. Then I made my way back t' the bunch uv chaparral whar I hed left my pony an' foun' hit all safe. My ride back t' Texas wuz painful, fur I wuz awful sore, but hit wuz also one uv the most pleasant rides uv my life, fur I knowed that eveh step my pony took, carried me neaheh t' Texas and further away from the 'Black 'Dobe.'

"The doctah I hed t' fix me up lowed that no other man could git such cuts an' live, but 'cept these ugly scars I don't feel no wuss on account uv that fight in the dark at the 'Black 'Dobe.'

"The Mexican officials reported the matteh t' our Consul at Mexico City, claimin' that a body uv twenty-five cowboys made a raid on some uv theah peaceable citizens down at the 'Black 'Dobe' an' killed five uv 'em, but yeh know that Greasers don't always tell the truth.

"That wuz two yeahs ago, an' our ranch reports that they hev neveh missed a steer since that time."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WILD HORSES.

"Speakin' uv wild hawses," said Sandy in response to a question propounded by Jim, "I hev hed a heap uv experience with them critters, fur yeh know the prairies is kivered with 'em out on the Washita river, an' clean down Red river t' Whaley's ranch. They most allus go in bunches uv from five t' twenty ur moah, an' when we lariat our ponies away from camp these heah wild hawses sometimes cause us a heap uv trouble, fightin our ponies, an' makin' 'em break loose, an' mebby causin' us a hunt uv two ur three days tryin' t' fin' 'em agin. Some uv these heah hawses kin run like blazes, but most uv 'em air no good fur cow-ponies, an' that's 'bout all the use we hev fur hawses in this country.

"I recollect havin' a white one once that I thought wuz 'bout the proper caper, an' hit wuz a whole lot betteh than airy Injun pony I eveh seed. I called this heah hawse 'Angel,' cause hit shoah looked as meek as ef hit hed wings an' wuz jest 'bout ready fur hit's flight t' the skies. Thar wa'n't nary colored hair in the critter's hide, hits tail dragged the ground, an' hits mane come down t' hits knees. When I'd lariat that hawse, instead uv turnin' hit loose with the herd uv nights, hit 'ud look at me with them meek an' confidin' eyes as ef hit wuz goin' t' shed tears because uv my lack uv confidence in hit. But jest the same hit took two good men t' put the saddle on that 'Angel's' back, an' hit all the time a-bitin', an' kickin', an' strikin' with hits fore feet fit t' kill, 'n when I got in the saddle yeh ought 'a 'seed that 'Angel' tryin' t' fly away with me. But as I wuz sayin, afteh I got hit down t' workin' order hit wuz good fur an all-day run, an' a whole lot better 'n some hawses, fur hit hed a heap uv sense an' good jedgment 'bout cuttin' out cattle. When I hed worked hit fur nigh on t' six months I trusted t' the appealin' look in them meek eyes one night an' turned hit loose in the herd with the other hawses. Next mawnin' I foun' my 'Angel' hed took wings and flew away, an' I hev neveh seed hit since. I hev foun' that all uv these wild hawses is 'bout the same. Hit don't make no difference how well broke yeh think they air, nor how kind an' gentle they git, the fust time the blamed critter is turned loose hit makes a clean break fur liberty, an' the chances are that hit will neveh git ketched agin.

"How do we ketch 'em? Well that is a purty hard question t' answer, an' hit's a heap harder t' do the ketchin'. These heah wild hawses is by a long shot the smartest critters in the world, an' when yeh try t' play a trick on 'em yeh allus fin' that instead uv foolin' the wild hawses, they hev fooled yeh, an' they'll make life mise'able fur yeh as long as yeh try t' trap 'em. They air knowin' critters, an' seem t' hev understandin' among themselves the same as people do. When the herd stops t' feed one uv 'em acts as guard, an' yeh kin bet all yehr money that hit never sleeps at hits post. Hit holes hits head straight up in the air an' them ears kin ketch a mighty little sound. Hit don't pay no 'tention t' nothin' but business, an' the way hit uses hits eyes, nose an' ears is wonde'ful, an' yeh'd shoahly be surprised at the way hit kin smell dangeh. When hit fin's anything that aint jest 'zactly right hit don't stop t' make no investigations, but hit somehow tells the herd that dangeh is nigh, an' they gallop away.

"Yeh might think yeh kin ketch 'em at night, but that's whar yeh git fooled agin, fur they keep a guard at night, too, an' jest 'bout the time yeh think yeh hev sneaked up on 'em, the guard gives the warnin' an' off they go. Uv course some uv 'em hev been ketched in this way: a whole lot uv men surround the wild herd at a great distance an' gradually close in on 'em, an' when they try t' run by, some feller may be lucky enough t' throw the rope on one uv 'em, but hit is mighty oncertain, an' a heap moah times yeh won't ketch none at all. Yeh might say thar is only one way uv ketchin' 'em, an' that is fur a lot uv men t' go out whar the critters kin be found an' when yeh see a bunch that yeh like the looks uv, one uv the fellers stahts out afteh 'em, only tryin' t' keep in sight uv the herd. He follers 'em fur forty ur fifty miles, an' the ponies make a circle an' come back agin near theah ole range, an' then another feller takes his place with a fresh hawse an' keeps up the chase, an' then anotheh, an' anotheh, an' they kin keep follerin' that herd 'till the hawses are all tired out an' the fellers behind 'em kin turn 'em any way, an' then the otheh men all jine in with him, an' the ponies air driv' t' some corral an' run in the pen, an' then hit air easy t' rope 'em, an' break 'em t' ride."

Shortly after the conversation between Sandy and Jim about wild horses, the two boys rode out one morning to bring in some ponies which were grazing along the Red river bottoms. On approaching the herd, Sandy called Jim's attention to the fact that there was a fine-looking wild horse with the herd of cow-ponies. They rode forward cautiously, and the wild horse continued to graze with the others until the cowboys were but a short distance away, when, suddenly looking up, the wild horse caught sight of them, and with a snort of fear plunged toward the open prairie. Before it could gather speed, Sandy had gotten within reach of it, and he whirled the coiled rope round and round his head, and then sent it singing through the air and the loop settled gracefully around the hind foot of the fleeing animal. The trained cow-pony braced itself for the shock, and as the rope tightened the wild horse was thrown heavily to the ground. Jim dismounted, ran up quickly and threw his weight on the head of the struggling horse, holding it to the ground. Sandy also dismounted, and taking Jim's lariat dropped the noose over the front feet of the horse, drawing them together so that it was impossible for the animal to move them. The hind foot was then drawn forward and fastened to the front ones, thus rendering the animal completely helpless. Sandy removed the saddle from his pony, and they soon had it securely girted on the back of the prostrate horse; the bridle-bits were put in the horse's mouth, and the reins pulled up over its neck. Jim then cautiously began to undo the fetters which bound it, and the pony feeling itself free of the lariat, bounded to its feet. Quick as had been the movements of the wild horse, Sandy's had been quicker, for as the pony found its feet, Sandy was sitting serenely in the saddle. Then began a desperate contest between horse and rider; the unreasoning fury and desperate strength of the wild horse pitted against the science and skill of the cowboy. Up and down they went, the horse turning, twisting, and writhing, squealing, striking, kicking and biting, jumping forward and backward, rearing up on its hind legs, then pitching forward on its front ones, until it seemed it would turn completely over. Jumping several feet in the air and coming down with muscles stiff and rigid, it tried every artifice by which it might unseat its rider, but Sandy, like "the old man of the sea," kept his seat, until, goaded beyond endurance by Sandy's spurs, the wild horse bounded across the plains and with wild, desperate leaps sought to escape from the rider by running away, but all in vain, and before night it had been subdued and broken to the saddle.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TRIP TO THE WICHITA MOUNTAINS.

A belief that there was gold in the Wichita mountains was universal among the people of northwestern Texas, and at this time many were prevented from making an investigation of the truth of this belief only by the warlike conduct of the Comanche Indians, who were in possession of these mountains and the surrounding country. There was an old hunter living up on Red river, just south of the mountains, who made frequent trips to the settlements, often bringing in with him fine Comanche-tanned buffalo-robes and other valuable skins, which he would exchange for ammunition and supplies,—always including a liberal amount of whisky. His father was a Frenchman, and it was believed that his mother was a Comanche squaw. He was on friendly terms with the Comanches, and without doubt furnished them with ammunition.

Some of his conversations with the whites, after taking a good many drinks of frontier whisky, were amusing, and often quite interesting. He would tell fabulous stories of the gold to be found in these mountains, claiming that the Indians guarded this secret with jealous care, and that they would not let him know where the precious metal was located, but that they had an abundance of it was positively true. He asserted that he had often seen them making bullets of this metal, when they were short of lead, and that one of their noted chiefs had a bridle with golden bits; also, that many members of the tribe had large quantities of it in their possession, but that they would not part with it, because they feared the whites would learn of it and then come and take their country from them.

Probably no one believed the old hunter's story, yet everyone believed that there was some gold in that country, and a possibility of striking it rich if the neccessary prospecting be done.

Early in the summer of 1867, three cowboys left the Three-Bar ranch, bound for the Wichita Mountains. The wonderful stories told by the old hunter, combined with the common belief and general talk of everyone on the frontier, had induced them to make this trip for the purpose of investigating the truth of these reports.

Bill Parker, Bud Skinner and John Meyers were the three adventurous cowboys who started on this hazardous enterprise. They were mounted upon the best ponies that could be procured, and armed with the best guns and revolvers then on the market. They felt able to protect themselves against any small number of Indians that they might meet, and they believed their horses were able to take them away from any large band that was too strong for them to fight. Game of all kinds could be found in abundance, hence they did not take provisions with them, preferring to rely upon what they could kill on the route. They crossed Red river above Whaley's old ranch, and leaving Fort Arbuckle to their right, directed their course toward the nearest foot-hills of the mountains.

When they arrived there, instead of finding a mountain range, as they had expected, they saw a range of hills, none of them of sufficient height to justify the appellation of mountains. They followed up a little stream that flowed down from the hills, and at about five miles distance from the plains came to a place that looked inviting for a camp; having plenty of fuel, good grass, an abundance of good cold water, and protected by an inaccessible bluff on two sides. Here they built a little tepee of brush and bark, spread their blankets within, and prepared to make this their home while they were prospecting. Four or five days of hard work did not disclose any of the precious metal, and as they were getting short of meat, John Meyers proposed to go up the stream and try to kill a deer, having noticed deer-tracks there the day before. He left the camp at about ten o'clock in the morning, and at dusk that evening had not returned. Thinking he might have gotten lost, the boys fired several shots to enable him to locate the camp; but they watched and waited for him all night in vain, and at daylight the next morning started out, following his trail. About three miles above the camp they found his body in the branch, almost covered with water. He had been shot to death with arrows, and many of them were left sticking in him. He had been scalped, his clothing and gun were missing, and his body had been horribly mutilated. The two boys scraped out a hole in the sand near the branch and buried him, covering the graves with stones to prevent it from being disturbed by wild animals, and immediately started for their camp, where they found everything all right. The fact that the Indians knew of their presence in the hills made their stay there exceedingly unsafe; they therefore determined to break camp and start immediately on their homeward trip.

Not deeming it safe to leave the hills in daylight, they remained at the camp until dusk, hoping by aid of the darkness to get fairly out upon the open plains before daylight; thus started, they had but slight fear of any pursuit, as they believed their ponies were superior to any the Indians possessed. They had come to the hills, riding over a long, high ridge, with a deep ravine on the south side and a gentle, level slope receding toward the north on the other side. They intended to return the same way, and as they reached the open plains and turned toward this ridge they were fired upon by a band of warriors that came toward them from the north. These warriors had evidently been informed by some of their scouts that the cowboys were escaping from the hills, and were waiting for them. To escape this band of warriors, the cowboys would have to distance them in a long race across the plains. Bud Skinner was in the lead, and Bill was following, leading their dead comrade's pony, that had been packed with everything used by them for camping purposes. The sound of the first shots fired at them had not died away ere they were off at full speed, making directly for the ridge before mentioned. After them came the Indians, whooping, yelling, and shooting; some of them using bows and arrows, but most of them using guns. The bullets whistled uncomfortably close to them, the arrows were flying thickly around, and the savage yells of the bloodthirsty Comanches sounded close behind. They urged their ponies to their fastest pace, hoping to get away from this shower of arrows and bullets.

"Let's turn t' the right down in t' that deep ravine that we seed as we come in," said Bud.

"No, don't go down there," cried Bill as he saw Bud turning his horse in that direction; "that is a trap from which we could never escape."

But, without heeding this advice, Bud continued on down into the ravine, and was soon lost to view. Bill did not follow him, for he knew that it meant almost certain death. He therefore continued on the high ground, and the pursuing Indians divided their forces, some of them going down the ravine after Bud and the remainder continuing after Bill.

For some time Bill thought that his good pony was going to leave the Indians far in the rear. He had released the pony that he was leading, and his own horse was running smoothly and easily over the short grass, with but four or five Indians in sight.

This even race continued for some time, when Bill slightly reined in his pony, so that it would not get entirely winded. He had observed that one of the Indians was riding a large white horse, and as he slackened his pace he saw that the white horse was gaining on him rapidly. Several of the other Indians were following, but they were so far back that he was out of range of their guns. The rider of the white horse urged it forward, seemingly determined to get the white man's scalp. This burly Indian had a repeating-rifle, and fired several shots so close to Bill that he heard the bullets whistle as they sped by him. Bill now determined that this combat should be speedily ended; he therefore stopped his horse, and, turning around facing the Indian, took quick aim and fired. At the crack of his rifle the Indian fell heavily to the ground, and Bill saw that it was not necessary to fire another shot. He rode on at a moderate pace, and as it was getting quite cloudy and dark, he soon lost sight of the Indians who were pursuing him, and felt that he was safe until daylight at least.

Knowing the skill and tenacity of the Comanches in trailing over the prairies, Bill continued his journey at the best speed he thought it advisable for his pony to make.

Sometimes he would dismount and lead the pony to give it a rest, and, traveling in this manner, sometimes riding and sometimes walking, he continued all night without making a halt, and the following day until about four o'clock in the afternoon, when he discovered some timber in advance. Believing this to be the Washita river, he turned down into the bottom prairie, intending to halt and give his pony water and feed. Bill was fatigued and the sun was shining extremely hot, and as he reached the oppressive air in the bottom ground he felt that he was becoming dizzy; then in another minute he fell unconscious from his horse.

Lightfoot, the Ponca Indian, with his squaw, had erected a little tepee down in the grove of timber, and they were hunting and fishing along the stream. Upon his return this evening he saw a horse grazing up in the bottom, and when he went to investigate he found that the horse had on a saddle and bridle and was considerably jaded, showing that it had just traveled a long distance. Lightfoot knew that the rider was somewhere near, and began a search for him, which was soon rewarded by finding him lying on the grass, alive but unconscious.

The Indian called his squaw to assist him, and together they constructed a litter of some poles, laid the unconscious man upon it, fastened it to the pony and dragged it to the tepee, and placed the man inside. Lightfoot discovered that the white man was his friend Bill Parker, and did all in his power to restore him. Bill finally opened his eyes, fully conscious, and all his mental faculties in good working order; but he was paralyzed, being unable to move either hand or foot. He could not tell where he was or what it was that held him down upon the rude pallet on which he was resting. His glance finally rested upon an Indian who sat smoking by his side, and he instantly recognised his Ponca friend.

"Where am I and what is the matter with me, Lightfoot?" asked Bill.

"Bill been heap sick; Lightfoot find um in grass where he fall off pony, and bring um to tepee," replied Lightfoot.

"What's the matter with me?" asked Bill.

"Lay heap still; need big medicine-man," said the Indian.

"How far is it from here to Fort Arbuckle?" asked Bill.

"Go in half-day, back mebby not so fast, bring medicine-man," said Lightfoot.

"When will you start?" asked Bill.

"Me go to-night; pony not able; me run heap fast," replied Lightfoot.

Without uttering another word, and before Bill fully comprehended his intentions, Lightfoot leaped out of the tepee and started in a good fast Indian trot over the hills toward the fort, and the next day returned with an ambulance and a guard of soldiers, who removed Bill to the fort, where, under the care of the army surgeon, he was soon restored to health.

His companion, Bud Skinner, was never heard from again, and in all probability lost his life in the ravine where he had sought safety.

CHAPTER XXV.

CATTLE DRIVEN TO ABILENE, KANSAS.

In the latter part of March the cowboys were called to the ranch for the purpose of assisting in gathering up a drove of beef steers that were to be driven to Abilene, Kansas. This consisted of two outfits working together: one to go on the range and gather up and drive to the corrals, the animals selected for this drive, and the other outfit to hold the cattle when bunched, graze them during the day and corral them at night. When the desired number was obtained, the whole outfit would combine and make the drive north. At that time a beef steer must be five years or more of age, and if it filled the requirements in this respect, it would sell without regard to size, build, or color.

Fifteen hundred head were gathered up and placed in charge of sixteen cowboys. They started north about the last of April, crossing the Red river about twenty-five miles northwest of Gainesville, Texas. At Fort Arbuckle they found the Ponca Indian Lightfoot, and employed him to pilot them north as far as the Arkansas river. There was at this time no trail over their route, and the crossing of streams and the selection of the most favorable ground over which to drive was of great importance, and none could direct them better than could this Indian. He was familiar with every foot of ground to be traversed, and his judgment of the depth of streams to be crossed was infallible. When they had reached a stream and found the proper place to ford it, Lightfoot would take a good look at the water, and then, riding up beside the foreman, would indicate the depth of the water by measuring on the side of the foreman's horse just where it would reach; and in no instance did he ever miss the correct depth.

The Indians of the plains were at this time constantly on the war-path, and they would hover along the trail, hoping to stampede the cattle and perhaps attack the drivers if a favorable opportunity occurred. The more civilized tribes, over whose country they were driving, were also constantly making demands for compensation, or toll, for the privilege of going across their lands, and often beef steers had to be given them to avoid trouble. All of these things were looked after by Lightfoot. He could tell on whose reservation they were traveling, and always knew when the demands for toll were just. He could also tell what parts of the country were favorable for the Comanches to attack them, and thus enable the cowboys to put on extra guards at that time, and this probably prevented many attacks that but for Lightfoot's sagacity and foresight would have been made.

About fifty miles northwest of Fort Arbuckle they were attacked one afternoon by a band of Comanche Indians. They were out upon the open level plains, and saw the Indians coming when they were two or three miles away. The cowboys immediately formed in line about a quarter of a mile in front of their herd. When the Indians got within range, the boys began the fight with a rapid fire from their revolvers. As soon as the first volley was fired the Indians all disappeared, having fallen over on the opposite side of their ponies, and all that could be seen of them was a moccasined foot on the pony's back and an occasional glimpse of an Indian's head as he reached under the pony's neck to fire his gun.

The Comanche Indians were the best riders in the world, and were able to screen themselves from observation in this manner and thus in a certain measure be protected from their adversaries' bullets, even when riding directly toward them. The Indians outnumbered the cowboys more than five to one, and started the attack in such a determined way that the boys thought it would be a desperate fight. They aimed low, knowing if they killed the pony the Comanche would be perfectly helpless on foot. The Indians attempted to circle around toward the herd, but their plans were foiled by the movements of the cowboys. Some of the Indians used bows and arrows, but the most of them had guns and not a few had long-range rifles. Two of their ponies were finally killed, and the riders taken up behind other warriors, and this seemed to dampen their enthusiasm, for, circling around toward the north, they were soon disappearing and the battle was ended.

One day just before they reached the south fork of the Canadian river, Lightfoot was taken violently ill and had to ride in the provision wagon at the rear of the herd. Sandy took his place as guide, and started out to find a good crossing of the river. Sandy was about two miles in front of the herd when he was suddenly confronted with a large, muscular, savage-looking Indian, riding a jaded pony that was wet with sweat and appeared to have been traveling for a long distance. Sandy was just in the act of firing a shot that would probably have decreased the Indian population in that part of the country, when he saw the Indian was making signs of friendship, and therefore permitted him to approach. The first request of the Indian was for tobacco. Finding that the Indian could speak some English, Sandy informed him that he was looking for a crossing for the cattle, and that if he would assist in finding a good one he should have all the tobacco he desired when the herd arrived. The Indian gave a grunt of satisfaction, and side by side they rode away toward the river. Several times Sandy detected the Indian trying to fall back in the rear, pretending that his horse was too tired to keep pace with the animal ridden by the cowboy.

At last, just before reaching the river, the Indian rode up quite close to Sandy and in a threatening tone of voice asked: "Is white man heap 'fraid of Comanche?"

"No," said Sandy, "Comanches air all cowards."

"Mebby so Comanche take white man's scalp," said the Indian, running the point of his index finger around his own scalp to indicate the manner in which this might be done.

Sandy turned, squarely facing the Indian, and pointing his revolver directly at the Comanche's heart, said: "Mebby so white man git the first shot."

Up went both of the Indian's hands, and begging Sandy not to shoot, he declared that he was a good Indian and would not harm anyone.

"I know yeh'll not harm me," said Sandy, "fur I'm not goin' t' take any moah chances with yeh."

Sandy then relieved the Indian of his revolvers and scalping-knife, and held him a prisoner until the herd arrived. Lightfoot said the Indian was a Comanche warrior, and that he had intended to kill Sandy if given a favorable opportunity. The Indian was released and told to get away speedily, and also warned that it would be exceedingly dangerous for him to again be seen following the herd.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CATTLE.

A drove of Texas cattle, when composed of all grades and kinds, including cows, calves, and beef steers, is difficult to handle, and requires considerable knowledge of the habits and disposition of the cattle to enable the drivers to successfully land the herd at the desired shipping-point. But when the herd is composed of animals five years of age or more, as was this drove, and gathered up off the range, where they ran and fed with the buffaloes; cattle as wild and fearful of the sight of man as an antelope or deer, great skill, untiring vigilance and perfect discipline are absolutely necessary, for otherwise the herd might soon be lost. But trained cowboys can manage a great drove of these wild, timid animals as easily and perhaps better than they could a drove of domestic cattle.

By the long and constant presence of cowboys on horseback, the cattle become accustomed to them, and their fear gradually leaves; but this is true only when the cowboys are mounted and like centaurs ride into their midst. Should a man dismount in a herd of these cattle, he would be in danger of being trampled to death in the stampede that would ensue; for the best trained herds could never become reconciled to seeing a man on foot, but would always flee when approached in that manner.

There was a large red steer that seemed to be the leader of this herd. It would go to the front when they were started in the morning, and keep its place during the whole day's travel. It was the autocrat of the herd, and its actions and demeanor regulated their conduct to a considerable extent during the long drive to Abilene.

The stronger and more active cattle would fill up the front and center of the herd, while the weaker ones fell to the rear or straggled along the sides; the "muleys," being without their natural weapons of defense, always followed in the rear.

On the trail the feet of many of the cattle became sore, and they were sometimes left because they were unable to keep up with the herd. There was one very fine steer that became so lame that it finally had to be dropped out of the herd and left behind, but that night before ten o'clock it arrived at the camping-ground and again joined the herd. It was left each day during the remainder of the drive, only to appear during the night, and it finally reached Abilene all right except that its feet were in bad condition.

When a drove of cattle are stopped for the night, the first thing to do is to find a suitable place to hold them until morning. A camp is usually selected where the ground is level, so that all the cattle can be seen at the same time; and also where, if a stampede should occur, the cowboys would have some chance to exert their skill in stopping and rounding them up. A detail of about half a dozen men take charge of the cattle and during the entire night ride round and round the herd. If the cattle become restless, or if everything gets very quiet and the conditions appear favorable for a stampede, the cowboys on guard will sing as they ride around, hoping to hold the attention of the cattle and to dispel any idea of a stampede that they may entertain. This the cowboy calls "singing the cattle to sleep," and long experience has demonstrated that it is a wise precaution.

When the cattle would stampede, the trained cowboys would ride along by the side of the running herd, in single file. When the foremost one reached the front he would begin pressing the leaders, causing them to gradually turn, and the other cowboys, following in regular order, would force the herd to slowly give away to the right, and this constant turning would cause them to run in a circle, sometimes more than a mile in diameter, but growing smaller and smaller as they continued running, until the cattle were finally in a compact mass, where they would continue to run round and round until completely exhausted. This process of running cattle in a circle is called "milling," and is the best and most successful way of stopping a stampede.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STAMPEDE.

The camp was on the Deep Fork of the Canadian river, in the Indian Territory. The cowboys were holding a drove of cattle on a little prairie bottom, with the land rising gently and gradually toward the open plains on the one side and on the other side the river, with a thick growth of timber along the margin. It was a warm, sultry evening and the air was oppressive, indicating a falling barometer and probably an approaching storm. Dark, threatening clouds were rising in the southwest, from whence bright flashes of lightning shot across the sky, followed by low, rumbling thunder, that seemed to roll and vibrate across the heavens and be lost in the distance. As the light of the setting sun faded away millions of fireflies appeared, swarming across the camping-ground, giving out a continuous flash of phosphorescent light, that looked weird and uncanny. The plaintive moan of the whippoorwill was hushed, the song of the katydid and the friendly chirp of the cricket could no longer be heard. All nature seemed in a dead calm, awaiting in silence, with bated breath, for the coming storm.

The herd consisted of over fifteen hundred head of five- to ten-year-old steers, as wild as the untamed buffalo, except that these cattle had been driven some distance and had learned to follow one another along the trail. The cowboys realized that this was a time when their greatest skill should be exerted, for the conditions were so unfavorable that they momentarily expected a stampede, which comes, not when noise and shouts and firing guns would indicate danger and strike terror to the bovine heart, as many suppose, but when everything is at rest, when quiet and silence reign supreme, and there is absolutely nothing that the closest scrutiny will disclose, to cause the panic.

The detail of cowboys that were on guard were trying to "sing the herd to sleep," and many of the cattle had lain down and were apparently sleeping and resting in fancied security; while the guards' ponies with loosened reins were grazing as they slowly walked around the herd. Suddenly, as though by preconcerted signal, the sleeping cattle jumped to their feet, and the whole herd, with the rush of a hurricane and the force of an avalanche, leaped forward in a wild, furious race,—and the stampede had begun.

Before the cowboys fully realized that it was a stampede their ponies saw the danger, and with heads erect, flashing eyes and dilating nostrils were bounding away from this wild, dangerous rush of frantic cattle. The animals were crowded close together, all apparently striving to get to the center of the herd and all running blindly forward, regardless of directions or obstructions. Like the roar of a great tornado the ear is greeted by the sound of beating hoofs and clashing horns. Woe to the hapless animal caught in the pathway of this resistless, turbulent mass of running cattle, for nothing can stop the force of their furious pace. Men or horses caught in their road would be knocked down and trampled to death beneath the feet of these panic-stricken cattle, and if one of their own number should unluckily fall it would meet the same fate. There is no governing power left in their midst, even their natural instinct of self-preservation has left them, and apparently without a guide or an object save the one impulse to rush madly forward, they continue their flight.

The night was dark, the ground strange, and considerably broken in the direction the cattle were running, and after an ineffectual attempt to stop them the cowboys abandoned the attempt for the night, and returned to camp; but early next morning all were out, and, striking the trail, followed it for about five miles, where a dozen stragglers were found. They were evidently unable to keep pace with the rest of the herd, and had therefore dropped out of the race. A short distance farther on disclosed a small trail branching off toward the right, and directly another toward the left, showing that the herd was breaking up into small bunches. These side-trails continued to increase in number, until it was difficult to determine which was the main one, but by following up each trail the cattle were finally all recovered. Ten days of hard work, however, was required to get them all back and ready to continue the northward drive.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

Camping, in fair weather on the open prairie, without tent or shelter, is delightful, and the cowboys usually slept in this way unless there were indications of rain, when a light tent would be pitched. The boys would spread their blankets on the grass and with their shoes or saddle for a pillow they had a bed which they enjoyed. One morning Jim was up at the break of day, and seeing that all of his comrades were sleeping unusually sound, he determined to have a little sport at their expense. Taking a saddle by the stirrup, he started to drag it through the camp, running by the sleeping men, shouting, "Whoa! whoa!" as if trying to stop a runaway horse. Instantly every man in camp was aroused and was on his feet, looking in all directions for the loose horse; but when the boys saw Jim with the saddle dragging after him, they caught on to the joke, and their momentary terror changed to a good hearty laugh, joined in by all of the victims.

A wagon drawn by a heavy yoke of oxen served to transport their provisions, blankets and extra clothing, and old Dick, the colored cook, was the driver. One day the Comanche Indians made an attack on them while they were driving across the open prairie, and several of the cowboys had to fall back to the rear of the herd to repel the attack and to prevent a stampede of the cattle. For a short time the firing was rapid and the cracking of rifles and revolvers and the whistling of bullets near the wagon sent a thrill of terror to the heart of old Dick. He began to urge the oxen forward as rapidly as possible and to sandwich in a prayer at every available opening.

"G' long da, Buck an' Brinle."

"O Lawd, doan' let de Injuns kill po' Dick."

"Whoa haw, Buck; come dis way Brinle. Gee, Buck. Edge ober da a little, Brinle."

"Lawd, I'se gwine t' do betteh. I'se stahted right now, an' if I ebbeh win a dollah I'll gib hit t' de preacher."

"G' long da. Yo-all jest poke along so de wheels doan peah t' be rollin."

"O Lawd, save me dis time an' I won't nevveh ax yo' t' help me no mo'."

"Buck, ef yo' doan move along fasteh, de Injuns will be chawin' on yo' ca'cass befoah night."

"O Lawd, skeer off de Injuns an' save ole Dick."

"Whoa da; youse gwine down hill. Hole 'em tight, Buck; plant yo' feet ahaid uv yo', Brinle, an doan let hit git away."

"Lawd, tun de bullets an' doan let 'em hit me. Sen' down yo' hosts, O Lawd, an' smite de Injuns! Kill 'em all, Lawd, an' I'll stan' by yo'."

"Pull up fasteh now; yo' gwine up hill; bofe pull stiddy, fur ef dis little load sticks yo', whah is yo repertation done gone?"

"O Lawd, ef yo' kaint keep de Injuns away, when I'm kotched take me straight up t' hebben."

"Brinle, the bluebottle flies will be blowin' yo' hide befoah campin'-time ef yo' doan move up fasteh."

"Buck an' Brinle, I'll wah de hides off'n yo' ef yo' doan git a move on dem lazy bones. I'se done woah out tryin' t' foce yo' t' go fasteh."

"O Lawd! stan' 'twixt me an' de Injuns, an' doan let 'em git no niah."

Finding it impossible to stampede the herd, the Indians abandoned the attack, and by the time the cowboys got into camp that night, Dick's scare was gone and his prayers forgotten.

A few nights after this attack, Dick was on guard, and becoming weary he sat down in the grass and began dozing. He awoke with a start, and looked about to see what it was that had startled him. Peering off to the left, where he could hear a slight rustling sound, he noticed the long grass gently moving a short distance away, and thought he could discern a dark object moving cautiously toward him. Suspecting that an Indian was creeping toward him with the intention of knifing him and then taking the camp by surprise, he took careful aim and fired. At the sound of the revolver-shot, the sleeping cowboys sprang to their feet, wide awake and ready for action, and were soon engaged in a spirited fight with the Indians, who had completely surrounded the camp. Finding they were unable to take the cowboys by surprise, the Indians scattered and fled, leaving behind them the brave whom Dick had killed. The bullet had gone through his head, causing instant death, and the cowboys congratulated him on his good shooting and the coolness displayed immediately afterward. When asked why he was so cool and nervy on this occasion after having been so badly frightened before, he replied:

"Hit makes er powe'ful sight er difference when de Injuns am shootin' at yo', whether yo' got er ox-whip er a good gun in yo' han'."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DUEL.

Steve Jones was the boss foreman of the herd. He was a good square man, but inclined to be irritable and a little quarrelsome, often blaming the men for some alleged carelessness or neglect when he was the one at fault; but in such cases he would usually acknowledge the error and make ample apology for the mistake, and for that reason the boys tolerated his peevish fits without resenting them.

One hot day as they were driving through the Indian Nation, they halted at a little stream to let the cattle drink. Bill Parker, who had always been very careful of his pony, now dismounted to let its back rest. This act was contrary to cowboy etiquette, for the rule was, never to dismount until camp was reached and you were ready to put your pony on the lariat. Steve Jones had noticed Bill's habit of dismounting to favor his pony, and was determined to "call him down" for it.

"Bill, why don't yeh get off yeh'r hawse eveh time we stop?" he asked.

"I do generally get off," responded Bill.

"Well, this heah hev got t' stop," said Jones.

"How do you propose to stop it?" asked Bill.

"I reckon this ought t' be able t' stop hit," said Jones, patting with his hand the butt of his revolver, suggestively.

"Don't start anything right now, Steve," said Bill, covering Jones with his navy revolver, "because I'm not feeling very well to-day and I might do something rash."

Two of the cowboys rushed in between the men and the prospects for an immediate fight vanished. It was, however, determined then and there that they should fight that evening, when all the boys could be present and enjoy the fun.

Bill Parker rode along that afternoon as in a dream. He had never flinched when called upon to meet either white man or Indian in a fair fight. In fact, he had accepted several little chances of that nature when the odds were decidedly against him, but that was in fair open fighting where he felt justified in killing his adversary if necessary. This proposed duel was entirely different from ordinary fighting, and looked to him more like murder. He would have given everything he possessed to avoid the combat, he was willing to do anything and everything possible and honorable to prevent it; but there was one thing impossible, and that was for him to exhibit signs of cowardice, or, as the cowboys expressed it, "show the white feather." He knew that any suggestion or hint toward a compromise would be taken as an act of cowardice, and hence he must fight.

When they went into camp that night, a delegation of the boys waited upon Bill to arrange for the fight.

"Jones says hit must be with navy revolvers," said the leader, "an' hit air your privilige t' name the distance."

"Make it five feet," said Bill, "and let each man empty his revolver before it is finished."

"Five feet!" repeated the other, "why, man, that's murder."

"Yes, that is murder," said Bill, "and so it is at any other distance. What difference does it make whether you kill a man at long range or short range? Jones will have the same chance to shoot that I have, and the fun for the boys will be greater."

They talked and plead with Bill, but he remained obdurate, and they were finally forced to accede to his terms.

When the ground had been measured off, and the crowd assembled to see the fight, the principals took their places in the position assigned to them. The distance between them was so short as to be really appalling, and called forth a protest from many of the cowboys. Each could place the muzzle of his revolver against his antagonist's heart, and any shot fired would probably be fatal.

Bill reached out his hand to Jones and said: "Shake, Jonesy, old boy, for before morning we will be hobnobbing with the angels, and we ought to be on speaking terms when we get there."

Jones looked at Bill for a moment, then seized his hand and shook it warmly, saying: "Bill, thar haint no call fur us t' kill each otheh. Let's call this heah fight off."

"That is perfectly agreeably to me," said Bill, "but the boys here will miss their fun, and feel like they were cheated if the fight is not finished."

"I'll fix that matteh with the boys," said Steve; and going to the wagon he opened his grip and extracted therefrom a quart bottle of Tennessee whisky, which the boys declared more than compensated them for missing the fight.

CHAPTER XXX.

TEXAS FEVER.

One peculiar feature connected with the cattle industry of the Southwest, was the fact that native cattle, grased along and over the trail, where the southern cattle had traveled, would often contract a virulent fever that usually resulted in the death of the animal in a few days. The Texas cow was healthy and hardy; upon her native heath a sickly or diseased animal was seldom seen. Why these healthy animals, when driven north, should communicate a disease to other animals, was for many years a question that remained unanswered, and so unreasonable did this theory appear, that many intelligent men refused to believe it. Practical demonstration for many years, however, has proved that it is true, and that this splenetic fever, or Texas fever as it is commonly called, is caused by a little tick, known to science as the "Boöphilus Annulatus."

Cattle, native to a fever-infected region, become immune to splenetic fever, but the parasite or germ remains in the blood for a period of years. The female tick falls from the cow and lays its eggs in the ground. Through blood drawn from the cow by the mother the young ticks contain these parasites and they fasten themselves upon passing cattle, and should the herd never have been exposed to fever inoculation, it will receive infection from the young tick.

At an early day in the history of the cattle industry of the Southwest, the Kansas Legislature was called upon to protect the native herds and to prevent the importation of these southern cattle. In the year 1867 they passed an act creating the first quarantine line, east of which line Texas cattle could not be driven except during the winter months. In 1872 the Legislature changed this dead-line, locating it farther west. In 1873 the Legislature enacted a law, prohibiting southern cattle from being driven into any part of the State except during the winter months. But, eventually, finding that prohibition did not prohibit, the Legislature in 1876 reëstablished the dead-line system, making a new one, farther west, and establishing quarantine lands in eastern Kansas, over which southern cattle could not at any time be driven. This quarantine line was again changed by the Kansas Legislature in 1877, also in '79 and '83, always being removed toward the west, until the western line of the State was finally reached.

The eager desire to accumulate wealth, inherent to a greater or lesser degree in every human breast, often impels the more venturesome and less conservative man to seek the place where the greatest inducements are offered, regardless of the obstacles to be overcome and the dangers surrounding them. Although driving these cattle into eastern Kansas was in direct violation of law, and a criminal offense for which the violators could be summarily punished, yet the profits derived from this business were so great that the commercial spirit proved stronger than the law, and every day during the summer season, cattle were driven in and through this forbidden territory. Sometimes the herd would be landed safely at a shipping-point and no trouble experienced by the owner; at other times the settlers, who were desperate because of the danger menacing their own herds, would gather up a crowd of farmers and capture these violators of the law; often they would be turned over to the local authorities to be tried according to law, but more frequently the settlers would execute the law in a rigorous manner by confiscating the cattle and destroying them, and the owner was extremely fortunate if he escaped with his life.

There was no trouble, however, about driving cattle over the route taken by this herd, for Lightfoot had directed them so that they arrived at the Arkansas river just at the mouth of Little river, where Wichita, Kansas, is now situated. At that time this point was more than fifty miles west of the settlements.

When the herd arrived at the river it was not fordable, and they were compelled to wait several days for the water to run down so that the cattle could cross without swimming. They were finally landed safely on the north side of the Arkansas river, and a drive due north for several days brought them to Abilene. This herd arrived at Abilene soon after the railroad had been completed into that place, and they were held on the prairie south of the river for almost a month, finally being shipped to Chicago.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ABILENE.

Abilene, Kansas, had all of the varieties of rough cowboy life known to any towns from which cattle were shipped; murderers, thieves, tough characters and bad men flocked into that place, and their daily contact with the wild, reckless cowboys, made the place one continual round of drinking, fighting, and killing. The good citizens were in the minority, and were entirely unable to cope with the lawless element thus thrust into their midst. Several of the local men tried to keep order and quiet on the streets, while acting as city marshals, but all failed, and conditions became so bad that it was not safe to walk the streets at night, and was not without danger in daylight. Finally, the authorities sent to Kit Carson for Tom Smith, and appointed him City Marshal. He was a brave, cool-headed, and nervy man, and by his efforts the rough element was kept fairly well in check, until he was killed, while trying to make an arrest out at the Miles and McConnel ranch. William Hicock ("Wild Bill") was next appointed City Marshal, and after killing a number of men he finally got the tough element to respect his authority; but law and order had to be enforced there by the ready use of the revolver, as long as the town remained headquarters for the cowboys.

One evening in the year 1872, when Wild Bill was Marshal of Abilene, he and Robert Murphy, an old-time engineer and now a resident of Kansas City, Kansas, were eating supper at a restaurant near the Alamo saloon, and while they were at the table Phil Cole, a sporting-man, and two cowboys known as the Thompson brothers, together with two other cowboys, came into the restaurant and invited Bill to go across to the Alamo and take a drink with them. Bill good-naturedly refused, and they picked him up in the chair and carried him into the saloon and had him to take a drink and then brought him back to the table where he had been eating. Bill knew that they were drinking heavily, and anticipated trouble with them that night. He consulted with Gus Williams, who was watchman for a variety show conducted near the Alamo saloon, and it was agreed that if Williams heard any trouble down about the saloon, he would come to Bill's assistance from the back way, across some vacant lots.

In a short time after this, Bill and Murphy went down to the Elkhorn saloon, and Bill began playing Spanish monte. Phil Cole and his friends soon came in, and after some rough talk he got upon the counter and began kicking off the glassware. Bill remonstrated with him, and asked the crowd to go out of the saloon and to be orderly and quiet. They immediately left the saloon and started down toward the Alamo. It was now getting quite dark, and as they walked along they fired two shots. Hearing the revolver-shots, Bill immediately started down in that direction. When Phil Cole heard Bill coming he fired at him, the bullet striking the building just behind him. Bill fired at the flash of Cole's pistol hitting him in the abdomen and inflicting a mortal wound. Just at this time Gus Williams, who had heard the shots, came running down the street with his revolver in his hand, and supposing him to be one of the Cole crowd, Bill fired two shots in quick succession, the bullets striking Williams in the left breast, not half an inch apart. Williams fell, exclaiming,

"My God! Bill, you have killed me."

Captain McGonigal (who was at that time Under-Sheriff of Dickinson county) and Wild Bill were the first two men to get to Williams, and as they tried to raise him to his feet he asked them for a doctor, but Bill, after examining his wounds, said,

"No; you want a priest."

And as they laid him down he was dead.

A large crowd gathered around Phil Cole, who realised that his wound was mortal, and begged for some one to pray for him, but out of that large crowd of rough men not one could offer a prayer for the dying gambler. Wild Bill was always deeply affected when talking of Williams, whom he had mistaken for one of the rioters.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SANDY AND JIM "SHOOT UP" ABILENE.

Abilene at this time had one street, running along on the south side of the railroad, and all the houses in town were ranged along on the south side of the street. There were but few business buildings, and they were mostly temporary structures, erected at a small cost for immediate use. At the west end of the business houses Tom Hoyt had just erected a new hotel, and this was the only place in town where travelers could be accommodated with food and bed. Just east of this tavern, which they had named the Planters' Hotel, was a grocery store, and the next house was the Kansas saloon.

One evening, when Sandy and Jim were in town drinking and having a good time generally, they wandered into this saloon and proceeded to take possession of it in the regulation cowboy style. The place was run by a German, who was a jolly, good-natured fellow, but who was entirely unacquainted with the wild and turbulent nature of the untamed cowboy when under the influence of intoxicating liquors. The cowboys were drinking excessively, and insisted on paying for the drinks for everyone who entered the building. They continued to drink, and to force everyone who entered to drink with them, until a late hour and until all the other visitors had gone to their homes. Finally the proprietor wanted to close up for the night, and so informed the two cowboys; but they objected strenuously, insisting that they be permitted to remain. The saloon-keeper then told them that he would have to put them out, and started to eject them. This was contrary to their preconceived ideas of the rights of a cowboy, and drawing their revolvers, they began shooting the glassware on the shelves, making bottles and tumblers rattle in a lively manner. The proprietor promptly crawled under the counter while the boys shot out all the lights in the room.

When the lights went out and they could see nothing more at which to shoot, they left the saloon and mounted their ponies. It was a bright moonlight night, and as they rode down the street they saw a man coming up toward the hotel, wearing a silk tile and carrying a grip. He had evidently just arrived in town, coming in on a late train, and was seeking a place to lodge for the remainder of the night.

The cowboys drew their revolvers and commanded him to lift his hat and to hold it up above his head, which he promptly did and they riddled it with bullets. The traveler dropped the hat, and yelling "Murder! murder! police!" started in a run, jumped over a fence into a private yard, and disappeared around the building.

He no doubt thought he had been attacked by "road agents" or highwaymen who intended to rob and perhaps murder him. But the boys had no desire to injure him, and simply wished to increase their night's entertainment by puncturing his silk hat with a few bullet-holes.

Riding up and down the street, the cowboys shot out every light of which they could catch the slightest glimmer, until not one was left burning. This exhibition of cowboy life was new to the citizens of Abilene, for this was probably the first demonstration of that kind ever witnessed in that place.

The next morning, after the boys had taken a good sleep and were duly sober, a man rode up to their tent, in camp, and informed Sandy, who went out to meet him, that he was a constable and had a warrant for two of the cowboys for shooting up the town.

"Wus any hahm done?" inquired Sandy.

"Well, no one was hurt," replied the constable, "but they just about demolished Swibert's saloon."

"Which two cowboys do yeh want?" asked Sandy.

"I don't know," replied the constable, "but I guess any two of them will do."

"I allow that yeh won't have much luck takin' one uv the boys out uv heah unless yeh know which one yeh want an' what yeh want him fur," Sandy replied.

"I tried to get the saloon man to come along with me and point out the ones he wanted," replied the officer, "but he said he was not looking for any more business with them cowboys."

"I reckon they wus drunk," said Sandy; "a few drinks uv that 'sheep dip' they sell up town for whisky will fix a man fur the crazy-house.

"It ar cleahly agin the constitution an' by-laws fur a Texas cowboy to be tried by a court up heah, but we are not lookin' fur trouble, an' if yeh can tell the amount uv damages done, I'll skirmish around an' see ef the boys can ante up the money."

The constable informed Sandy that twenty-five dollars would square the matter with the saloon man, and upon being paid that amount of money he departed, expressing himself as well pleased with the settlement.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEWTON.

Newton, Kansas, had an experience in the cattle trade, which, although of short duration, rivaled any place in the State, and left finger-prints on its early history that will never be obliterated. This town was laid out on section 17, township 23, which was at that time a part of Sedgwick county, Kansas.

The Santa Fe Railroad ran diagonally across Main street, and the cattle trail from the south crossed the same street about eighty rods north of where the railroad crossed it. The principal business places of the town were at that time in the first three blocks north of the railroad crossing. The triangular piece of ground west of main street and south of the railroad tracks was set apart for dances and bawdy-houses, and was known as Hyde Park. Settlement in Newton commenced about the first of May, 1871, and the first herd of cattle passed along the trail going north, about the middle of that month.

Captain Dave Payne, the noted Oklahoma boomer, was an early settler at Newton, and dug a public well at Sixth and Main streets. Nelly Bailey, more or less noted in history and story, lived at that time with

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WICHITA.

Wichita was headquarters for the Texas cattle trade for two or three years after the Santa Fé Railroad was completed into that place, and nearly all of the tough characters of the West drifted into the city during that time. One of the best known "bad men" there was "Rowdy Joe," who had formerly been at Abilene. He had a common-law wife, who was his partner in crime, and who could drink more poor whisky and shoot quicker and more accurately than could Joe. She was known as "Rowdy Kate," and fully justified the appellation, for it was said that she had shot and killed five men, two of whom were former husbands. She was jointly interested with Rowdy Joe in a dance-house on Douglas avenue, just south of the river. Old Red, also a killer and an all-round tough, started a dance-house just west of Rowdy Joe's place, and one evening in the summer of 1872 they were sitting in front of their respective places discussing the direction that the Arkansas river was running just where the bridge crossed, and Old Red disputed Rowdy Joe about the matter. Without any further provocation, and probably, as he afterward expressed it, to "cinch the argument," Rowdy Joe drew his revolver and shot Old Red through the breast, causing instant death. Rowdy Joe was never arrested for this crime, but continued in the same business by annexing Old Red's place to his, making a double establishment.

Joe Basset, one of the best known gamblers of the Southwest, was in 1873 operating a gambling-house at Jim Dagen's place, over the saloon on Main street, near Douglas avenue. One day a drummer called Long Long visited Basset's place, and, playing lucky, won several hundred dollars playing "bank." After he quit the game he invited Basset to go down town with him and show him the sights, as he had never before been in a red-hot cowboy town. Long Long was a tall, slender man, a neat dresser and polite and suave at all times; he was about six feet five inches in height, and this was probably the cause of his being called "Long Long." Basset took him over the river to Rowdy Joe's place, where they found about fifty men and women engaged in dancing. Everything was harmonious and peaceable for a while, and Long seemed to be enjoying himself greatly, but presently some cowboys who had been drinking freely, and for that reason, probably, were refused admittance to the hall, rode around to the north side of the building and fired twenty or thirty shots through the windows, probably not intending to kill anyone, as the shots all ranged sheriff, and went on to Wichita, where he eventually found three men and placed them under arrest, charging them with the theft of the team and wagon. Jones had one man with him, and, loading the three prisoners in the wagon which they had recovered, they started back, ostensibly for Great Bend, but the three men accused of the theft never reached there; and for several years nothing further was known of them. One day, ten years afterward, a man came before the authorities at Great Bend and procured a warrant for Jones, charging him with murder. The man who swore to the complaint said that he was one of the three men whom Jones had arrested, charged with the crime of stealing the wagon and team at Dodge City. He said that when the three of them were turned over to Jones and his companion, by the authorities at Wichita, they were bound with cords and tied down to the bottom of the wagon, in which condition they rode all day until after sunset, when they stopped and went into camp. That they were on the banks of the Arkansas river, about forty miles from Wichita. When they were taken out of the wagon they were placed up against a little bank and told to sit there perfectly quiet. This man said that they were left sitting there until after Jones and his partner had eaten their supper, when the two men walked out toward them and began firing their revolvers. He saw his two comrades fall dead and himself received a shot in the head and one in the breast, when he became unconscious, and remained in that condition for several hours. When he regained his senses the sun was shining on his face from directly south, so that it was about noon of the following day. He was unable to move, and laid in that condition until that evening, when he was discovered by a party of Osage Indians who had stopped to camp at the river. They buried his two companions, and he was taken by the Indians to some place in the Indian Territory and the "Big Medicine Man" healed his wounds. He protested that he was innocent of the crime charged against him, and declared that he and his two companions had never been farther west than Wichita. For some reason this case was never prosecuted.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RETURN TRIP.

Some of the cowboys spent considerable time visiting and sight-seeing in Kansas City, and other places of interest, but all reassembled at Abilene about the middle of September, and from there started on their return trip to Texas. It was a fine, bright morning when they started south over the prairies of Kansas. They did not attempt to follow any trail or path, but directed their course toward the southeast, intending to reach the old Fort Gibson wagon-road.

The second day out, they discovered a herd of antelope quietly grazing on a slight eminence about half a mile distant. Jim had never had the experience of hunting or shooting antelope, and was very anxious to try his skill at killing one of them. The boys readily agreed to wait for him, and, armed with a long-distance target rifle, he started out upon this mission.

The antelope is one of the most timid animals in existence, and is wise beyond the comprehension of the average "tender-foot" who seeks to get a shot at it. Jim started down a low place or swale of the prairie, and was soon out of sight of the antelope. Following along this swale, stooping and crawling to keep out of sight of his game, he finally reached a place where he was sure they were within reach of his rifle. He carefully examined his gun to see if it was in order, then placing it to his shoulder, with bated breath and trembling nerves he slowly rose until he was standing erect,—but the antelope were not there. Jim was amazed; he wiped his eyes and gazed around, wistfully looking for his intended victims, and was at last rewarded by seeing them grazing on another hill about a mile away. He followed them again and again, only to be deceived in the same way, until he became disgusted with the hunt and returned to the boys, tired, and very much chagrined at his failure.

"The next time yeh go t' hunt antelope," said Sandy, "don't let 'em see yeh comin' an' then go out uv theah sight an' try t' slip up on 'em, fur yeh kaint do hit. The antelope are a heap too wise an' hev got too much sense fur that, an' hit won't let yeh make a target uv hit in that way. Yeh might foller 'em fur a month an' neveh git a shot. I'll tell yeh how yeh kin fool 'em some, an' mebby git one uv 'em. They hev a powe'ful sight uv curiosity kivered up in theah hides, an' ef yeh'll lay down in the grass an' hol' a handkerchief ur a rag ur even yeh foot up jest above the grass an' keep hit movin' like, so the antelope kin see hit, it 'll git anxious t' know what hit is, an' 'll come towards yeh a few steps at the time, stop an' look, an' paw the ground a little, an' then come closer an' her parents about ten miles west of Newton. She could ride a horse, shoot a revolver, or drive cattle as well as an expert cowboy.

Judge C. S. Bowman erected one of the first houses, and many others soon began settling and building, so that in a short time there was quite a village. When the first cowboys arrived in town the streets were still covered with grass and the prairie-dogs barked at them from their native kennels. A clothes-line was stretched from Bowman's little frame shack to another building about one hundred feet distant. A cowboy came galloping by the house one evening about dusk, and not seeing the line, attempted to cross that way, but the wire caught him under the chin. The pony continued along the even tenor of its way without pausing, but the cowboy was left hanging to the line and when he got on his feet and recovered his breath, his language was forcible and violent and filled the air with oaths and curses, and everybody hid out to escape the bullets which he was firing in every direction.

The first Baptist Church now occupies the ground where he stood and the baptistry is located at the exact place where he fell: no doubt the atmosphere is more pure there now than it was that night.

Sometime during the early spring two cowboys got into an altercation on the street in front of the Bulmer Hotel, and one of them shot and killed the other. The one that did the killing was arrested, and two men started with him to Wichita, a distance of about twenty-eight miles. They returned the next day with the cowboy's pony, saddle, bridle, hair lariat, belt and revolvers, and reported that the man tried to escape and they were compelled to shoot him. No further inquiry was ever made regarding the matter.

One night in June, 1871, at a dance-house in Hyde Park, a difficulty arose between cowboys and railroad men, and a fight with revolvers ensued. The whole town was aroused by the rapid firing of revolvers and the shouts and oaths of the combatants. Several hundred shots were fired, and thirteen men were killed and wounded. The dead were buried on a little knoll in the southeast part of town, and it was named "Boot Hill," because the men interred there all died with their boots on.

upward and therefore went above the heads of the dancers. Long Long heard the revolver-shots and saw the glass shattered and falling to the floor, and then he made a rush for the door and down the street toward the bridge, followed by Basset, who was accustomed to such exploits and wished to convince his friend that there was no cause for alarm. Basset called in vain for Long to halt and wait for him, but that polite gentleman, looking back and seeing Basset was calling him, replied: "No, no; many thanks, Basset; I am under many obligations for your courtesy in introducing me to this lively and interesting cowboy show, but I have other engagements that will prevent me from staying longer, and I do not desire any company at this time, as my mind is preoccupied and I could not be social; so if you will permit me I will proceed to the hotel alone." All of this was spoken while he was making double-quick time toward the bridge. Basset was unable to overtake him until he reached the hotel, and then it took several good stiff drinks of whisky to get his nerves back to their normal condition.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DODGE CITY.

The volume of business in the cattle trade at Dodge City was greater than that of any other town in Kansas. Here the stockmen could drive without danger of coming in contact with the Kansas quarantine laws, and hence for many years this city had practically a monopoly of the cattle trade. Here, as in other cattle towns, many men became noted for certain peculiar personal characteristics. Mysterious Dave, Bat Masterson, and a host of others were potent factors in the early history of this place, and probably no other town in Kansas ever had the amount of public notice and notoriety or ever attracted the world-wide attention as did Dodge City.

When the buffalo-hunters were killing so many of these animals, a man named Jones had a grocery store at Dodge City, and he purchased a wagon and team and was making good money by hauling into town the robes and sometimes the meat of animals slain by these hunters. One night some thieves stole his team and wagon, and left, going east. He followed the trail down to Great Bend, and there procured a warrant for their arrest, had himself appointed as deputy closer, an' ef yeh hev lots uv patience an' are keerful not t' skeer hit by showin' yehrself any, hit 'll finally come close enough fur yeh t' shoot hit."

"Why didn't yeh put me next t' this antelope business befoah I started out on that fool trip?" asked Jim.

"Well," replied Sandy, "thar is a heap uv ways t' learn things, but the best an' shoahest way is t' go up agin hit yehrself; fur the information will be lastin'. I hev seed fellers that would lose a powe'ful sight uv money bettin' agin a sure thing, but yeh could only ketch 'em once on the same game."

"Ef I eveh try t' kill anotheh antelope," said Jim, "hit'll be when one uv 'em tackles me an' I hev t' fight fur my life."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PRAIRIE FIRE.

Out upon the wide, wide prairie, where in all directions the blue sky comes down to meet the earth, with not a tree or bush or hill or vale on which to rest the weary eye, not a road or path or barren spot to break the dreary monotony of this vast field of grass. The autumn frosts have changed the bright green carpet to a more somber hue, and the stems and blades have a tinge of brown, indicating that the summer growth has ceased and the grass is now matured. The blades twist and entwine in a thousand fantastic forms, with the long stems waving, rising and falling like the billows of the ocean with each gust of the wind, as it steadily blows a stiff breeze from the south.

The farmer's plow has never turned a furrow in this great field, nor has the farmer's reaper ever cut a swath of the rich harvest now spread out over these plains. Here is the wild fodder planted by the all-wise Creator as food for the antelope and the buffalo; here they lived and thrived and left only when driven away by the ruthless hand of man.

A flock of prairie-chickens, sailing over this natural meadow, alight in the thick grass to feed upon the seeds, which are now ripe and falling to the ground. A coyote is slyly winding its way in and through the grass, with intent of pouncing upon a jack-rabbit that is sitting in a secluded nook, sleeping with one eye open. Away toward the south, on the slope of a little mesa, a herd of buffalo are feeding, where the grass is short and to the bison probably more palatable.

A little cloud, at first a mere speck upon the southern horizon, has been rapidly spreading, and has now covered, as with a heavy veil, that portion of the sky. From the east to the west the dark ominous clouds are pushing forward and upward as if impelled by some invisible force in the rear. Still this dense cloud of blue-black smoke continues to rise; now bright red flashes of light are mingled with the walls of gloom, and the whole earth seems enfolded in this hazy mist. It is a prairie fire! Look! see how rapidly it approaches. The crackling, consuming roar can be distinctly heard as the blaze shoots upward, making a wall of fire that leaps with each gust of the wind, coming down in sheets of flame, catching the dry fuel a hundred feet in advance, and instantly repeating this forward movement until it has reached a speed that is almost incredible. Fleet-footed indeed must be the animal that escapes this fire monster by flight.

The prairie-chickens are alarmed, and quickly soaring away are lost to view in the distance. The jack-rabbit has smelled the smoke, and is seeking safety in rapid flight. The coyote, too, has scented the danger, and, abandoning all hope of catching "Bre'r Rabbit," is stretching away at its greatest speed, running so swiftly that it seems but a gray streak vanishing toward the north. But the stupid buffaloes, although quick enough to scent danger from human foes, refuse to be warned by the dense smoke and roaring flames, and continue to graze until the heat begins to singe their hair and scorch their hides, when by common impulse they start away from the danger in a wild, mad stampede. Away they go over the hill and down the slope on the other side. Fear lends wings to their speed, and, with a fury born of fright, they rush over the plains, while close in their wake the fire continues to crowd them. At last they reach a higher plateau, where the grass is shorter and the fire cannot travel so fast; but alas! even here their furious race is not ended, for the large tumble-weeds, that are now matured, are uprooted by the gale and caught in the blase; forced by the wind, they begin their curious race across the plains; carrying with them the fire, they travel as fast as the fleeing buffaloes. The blazing weeds and twigs ignite the grass as the weeds roll over it, and the speed and fury of the fire are augmented by this means; hence the buffaloes have no relief until in their wild flight they reach a buffalo-wallow covered with water from recent rains, and into this haven of relief they rush, and the race is ended.

The roaring, seething hurricane of fire passes by, carrying death and destruction to every living thing. It has left in its path, not the waving fields of grass, dotted here and there by fragrant wild-flowers, but the panorama has changed, and we look upon a scene of desolation. Here and there the charred remains of some animal that perished in the flames, and stretching away to the east and to the west, to the north and to the south, are the dreary, black and forbidding plains, now shorn of all that was beautiful.

Riding leisurely over the prairie that afternoon, the cowboys noticed a smoke rising majestically up in the south and forming a heavy dark cloud across the southern sky.

"By hoky! that are a prairie fire," said Sandy; "we'd betteh git a move onto ourselves ur we'll git scorched purty quick."

They leaped from their horses and removed the saddles, each taking his blanket with which to fight the fire. Forming in a line about ten feet apart and facing the north, each one fired the grass in front, and with their blankets they beat out the back-fire. Before many seconds had elapsed there was a big fire burning in their front and going toward the north. They led their ponies across where they had beaten out the back-fire and were safely stationed on burnt ground. This work was all done quickly and accurately, and just as they passed over to the burnt space prepared by their own fire, the great fire from the south burned up to the place they had vacated; one minute longer and they would have been enveloped in the flames.

"That wuz a mighty close call, an' we jest got the hawses oveh in time t' save 'em," said Sandy.

"Yes," said Bill; "we owe our lives to your wisdom and quick work."

"Hit wuz the hottest one I eveh seed," said Sandy. "Hit come like a race-hawse, an' theh wuz no time fur foolishness."

"I hope," said Jim, "hit didn't ketch no animals asleep, fur ef hit did theh wuz shoahly burned up."

"Hit may ketch them antelope yeh wuz afteh, fur hit's goin' in that direction," said Sandy, with a smile.

"Well, ef the fiah don't have no betteh luck ketchin' 'em than I did they are not in much danger," said Jim.

"The antelope knows uv some creek ur buffler-wallow whar they will be safe," said Sandy, "an' yeh kin bet yehr life they'll git thar when the fiah comes."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THROUGH THE INDIAN NATION.

There was a wagon-road from Kansas through the Indian Nation to Texas, leading down along the west bank of Grand river, crossing it at Fort Gibson and thence continuing south to Trotter's Ford, on Red river. Fort Gibson at that time had but few actual residents, although the Government had a few soldiers stationed there, whose duty it was to keep in check the lawless element that predominated in the Territory at that time.

The fort was on the east side of Grand river, and a flat-bottomed boat, attached to a chain stretched across the river, served as a ferry-boat. It had to be pulled across by hand, and its capacity was limited, but amply sufficient to accommodate the traveling public; for the country was wild and traveling through it was often dangerous, and hence but few people ventured along this line of travel.

The boat was operated by an old blind man, who was perfectly familiar with all of the surroundings, and needed no assistance in guiding the boat. Although the travel was meager, yet there was no competition and no other way of crossing the river, hence the old ferryman could regulate his own charges and suit his own convenience about the time he would transport travelers across. Sometimes it would be several hours before the captain could be induced to go aboard his vessel, but when the work was done, the traveler was always relieved of the most of his spare change.

When the cowboys arrived at this crossing, the boat was safely moored on the opposite shore and no one in sight. They began a series of shouts and war-whoops, but could attract no one on the opposite side. Their repeated cries of "Bring over the boat," echoed and reëchoed along the bluffs on the other side, but brought no response from the boatman, and they were preparing to plunge into the river and swim their ponies across, when they saw the old boatman begin to slowly pull his vessel across toward them. As he approached they could hear him chanting in a dolorous monotone the following ditty:

"A couple of Dutchmen rolling a barrel of sauer kraut,
A couple of Dutchmen rolling a barrel of sauer kraut,
Away down the Arkansaw."

The nearer he approached, the more distinct was the song, but the words were not changed, for he neither added to nor took from the original stanza. The boat was landed and the boys took their ponies and luggage aboard and were pulled across and safely landed on the opposite side, without the old boatman having answered a question or uttered a word except the incessant chant of his favorite song.

The boys asked him how much he charged, and he replied, "Fifteen dollars," and with the same breath continued his song. They paid the exorbitant charges without a protest, and as they rode away the last sound that smote upon their ears was the now familiar refrain of that never-ending song.

Traveling along through the Nation, at every stream, at every place in the road where some little labor had been required to make the road passable, and at every place where it was possible to have an excuse for charging toll, they would find an Indian demanding money for the privilege of passing. At places where it was not difficult to find another route the charges were very moderate, but at places where the open trail could not be avoided the charges were from three to five dollars each.

The Indians were not very cordial or even friendly toward white men traveling through their country, rating all strangers as possible outlaws; for that country was infested by many desperadoes and criminals, who would rob the Indians as well as the passing travelers.

The law, if any there was in the Nation at that time, was so difficult to enforce that men rarely sought the courts for redress for grievances, but each individual relied upon his own ability to protect his property and his life. Occasionally a band of robbers would become more aggressive than usual, and, when appealed to, the Government would send a few soldiers to capture them. If caught, the robbers were taken down to Fort Smith and tried before Judge Parker. There was but little leniency shown by that court toward murderers, and applications for continuances and delays in such cases fell upon deaf ears unless justice and equity demanded it. If convicted, the murderer was not kept in suspense, waiting and hoping for pardon, but the death sentence was speedily inflicted.

Judge Parker believed in giving exact justice to everyone, but he had brought before him the worst class of criminals that ever infested any country, and seldom indeed were the cases where clemency should have been shown. It is said that during the time he was judge of the court at Fort Smith he passed sentence of death on more murderers than was ever before done by any judge of any court in the United States.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A LUCKY SHOT.

Passing through the Chickasaw Nation, they one night stopped at a little stream to camp, and while they were preparing their evening meal a man rode up and accosted them with a friendly salute, and began conversing in a pleasant manner. He was a large, muscular man, dressed in hunting garb, and rode an exceptionally fine horse. When he learned that they were cowboys, returning to Texas after having delivered a drove of cattle in Kansas, he told them that they had chosen a dangerous place for a camp, and advised them to go on to the next creek, about six miles ahead. "For," said he, "many a good man has gone into camp here and was never heard from again." The boys replied that they were able to take care of themselves, and that if they were attacked while in camp it would probably be the other fellow who would never be heard from again. For reply, the stranger smiled, bade them good-night, and rode away.

He was gone about half an hour, and returned. Dismounting, he remarked that they were good fellows, and that he had concluded to camp with them.

He was an unwelcome guest, but they treated him civilly and he began preparing to make himself comfortable for the night. In a short time four other men rode up and signified their intention of also camping there for the night. Rough, husky-looking fellows they were, all heavily armed and all riding good horses. It now began to dawn upon the cowboys that they were entertaining a band of outlaws.

After supper one of the strangers discovered a little rattlesnake coiled up with its head in the air, ready to strike its fangs into any intruder. He immediately drew his revolver and shot several times at the head of the snake, but missed the mark. Some of his companions joined him, and quite a number of shots were fired, but none of them could hit the head of the little rattler, until Sandy walked out where they were, and seeing the mark they were shooting at, drew his revolver, and, apparently without taking aim, fired, and making a center shot he severed the snake's head from the body as smoothly as it could have been done with a sharp knife. The outlaws walked away, saying nothing about this remarkable shot.

That night the cowboys lay on their blankets with their revolvers in their hands, and their fingers on the triggers, ready for instant use. They did not sleep, but momentarily expected that an attack would be made upon them, and were relieved only when the morning dawned.

After breakfast, when the outlaws had mounted and were ready to leave the camp, the heavy man who had first called on them the evening before, and who appeared to be the leader of the band, offered Sandy his hand, and said: "Partner, we had intended to take your horses and cash before parting, but that shot you made at the rattler got the boys a little shaky, and they was leary about having that pistol turned in their direction, and so we concluded that your horses were not worth much, and as for the cash I doubt if all you have got would pay for one round of drinks. So if you will forgive us for the harm we did not do, we will part friends."

"I don't want yehr friendship, an' I neveh shook han's with a robbeh an' neveh will," said Sandy, refusing the proffered hand, "but yeh kin go as yeh come, without our consent and without our objections."

CHAPTER XL.

THE PROPOSAL.

Barnard Raymes had tried every plan and devised every scheme that to him appeared feasible, to win the love of Circle-Dot. He was a constant visitor at her home, and in a measure forced his wooing, until as a matter of self-protection she had to ignore his slightest offer of kindness and to rebuke any offer of a more intimate acquaintance. Her mother could find no excuse for this aversion constantly exhibited toward Raymes, and Circle-Dot was often compelled to appear cheerful and light-hearted when feeling as if she would like to cry. Matters were now rapidly unfolding and it seemed that a crisis was imminent, for Raymes had determined to push his suit, and, if possible, win his bride before the cowboys returned from their drive to Abilene; for there was still a lurking suspicion in his mind that Bill Parker was the sole cause of Circle-Dot's indifference toward him. After reflecting and brooding over the matter for some time, he determined to settle the anxiety and uncertainty by immediately asking her to become his wife.

Attired in faultless array and riding his favorite horse, he one day rode over to the Circle-Dot Ranch, and when ushered into the house was fortunate enough to find Circle-Dot at home. Notwithstanding the fact that his reception was cool, he boldly announced to her that he had visited her for the sole purpose of laying his heart and fortune at her feet, urging her to accept him for her promised husband.

Circle-Dot was astonished, and for a moment unable to reply. She had long suspected his designs, but had not thought it possible for him to speak to her about this matter until she had at least given him to understand that she was friendly disposed toward him. His assuming manner and confident tone of voice offended her. She therefore told him that she could never listen to such language from him. That she had tried to show him by her former conduct that his suit was hopeless, and that never by word or act had she given him cause to think otherwise.

Raymes was at first pale and ghastly, but at the conclusion of her answer the hot Spanish blood rushed to his temples, and in suppressed tones he replied: "I know the man who has supplanted me in your affections. I know why you refuse me, and I'll tell you now that I'll deal with him in my own way, but so that he will never have the satisfaction of claiming you for his bride. He has already made himself so obnoxious to me that accounts between us must be settled as soon as he gets home."

"I regard Mr. Parker only as I do my other friends," replied Circle-Dot; "but I infer from the threat you have made, that you will seek a personal encounter with him when he returns. As I would be the innocent cause of this trouble, I would very much regret it. However, Bill Parker is perfectly able to take care of himself against you or any other enemy he may have, so long as he is given fair play, but if you should contemplate assassinating him without his having a chance to defend against your attack, then I warn you that I myself will see that he is avenged."

And with a superb gesture of disdain she left the room.

Raymes could not help admiring the fire and spirit that actuated Circle-Dot and caused her last remarks, and again he resolved that by some means, fair or foul, she should some day be his bride.

When Raymes mounted his horse to leave Circle-Dot's home the conflicting emotions in his breast, of anger and chagrin, were so strong that he concluded to relieve the pressure by drinking. Turning in the direction of the nearest place where liquors were sold, he was soon in the saloon, and walking up to the bar, asked for brandy. When the liquor was set before him he drank several times in quick succession, and then turned to leave the place. As he walked toward the door he saw a man sitting on the floor, and by his side a dog looking wistfully up at its master's face. Raymes recognized the man as Joe Dingby, and without speaking attempted to walk by, but unfortunately struck his foot against the dog, and in trying to regain his equilibrium his other foot came in contact with Joe's outstretched legs, and he fell to the floor. Without uttering a word, Raymes arose, drew his revolver, and shot the dog.

Joe watched the dying struggles of his dog with remorse and anger, but being unarmed, wisely refrained from any hostile demonstrations. But as Raymes walked out of the door Joe said, "A tooth fur a tooth, an eye fur an eye, a life fur a life, is the Mosaical law, an' hit is my religion." Joe took the dead dog out of the house and down into the woods and buried it, moaning and weeping in genuine sorrow, and frequently repeating, "A life fur a life—that is my religion."

CHAPTER XLI.

TRIED BY REGULATORS.

Killing a man, if done in a fair fight, was not considered a very serious crime on the Texas frontier in early days, but stealing was a capital offense, and the culprit, when caught stealing a cow or horse, was summarily disposed of,—sometimes by hanging, but generally by being shot to death. To arrest a horse-thief and take him before a legally constituted court of justice to be tried for the crime would have appeared as a farce to the cowboys and ranchmen. They would ask, "Why should a guilty man be entitled to the delays and uncertainties incident to the trial of a case by the courts, where, through the ingenuity and skill of some lawyer, the criminal may be acquitted, and thus escape the punishment which he so justly merits?"

This argument, although possibly not strictly logical, was satisfactory to the rough pioneers, and they dealt with such cases according to their own interpretation of right and wrong.

To protect their property, prevent stealing, and to administer punishment commensurate with the crime committed, the ranchmen and cowboys had an organization known as "The Regulators," before whom all persons accused of stealing cattle or ponies were arraigned for trial, and if a majority voted for his conviction, sentence of death usually followed. The trial was presided over by the captain of the Regulators, and from his rulings there could generally be no appeal. If the defendant was found guilty of the crime charged, he was executed without delay. This summary way of trying offenders, although seemingly harsh and cruel, was, owing to the conditions of the country at that time, really necessary to enable good citizens to protect their property. In many of the counties of western Texas there was at that time no county organization, and therefore no officers whose duties it would be to protect the citizen in his property rights; hence the Regulators were approved of by the better class of residents as necessary to preserve law and order in the country. These trials were held at some ranch, after notice had been given to the neighboring cowboys and stockmen to be present and assist in the investigation,—and also to assist in executing the sentence, should one be rendered against the defendant.

Soon after Bill Parker arrived at home from his trip north with the cattle, word was brought to him that Barnard Raymes had boasted, while drinking at a saloon, that he had selected Bill for a target, upon whom he intended to practice at the first favorable opportunity. Bill had no knowledge of the proposal of Raymes to Circle-Dot and of the bitter language and threats used there, and was therefore incredulous when this word was brought to him, and thought there must be some mistake, for the reason that he was positively sure that he had never given Raymes the slightest cause for anger, and if such threats were made it must have been when he was partially intoxicated and without any intention of fulfilling them.

A short time after receiving this word he was riding over the range a short distance from the Raymes ranch, when, seeing a cowboy coming toward him, he turned and rode to meet the horseman.

"Good morning," said Bill.

"Howdy?" said the cowboy.

"Did you wish to speak with me?" asked Bill.

"Air yehr name Bill Parker?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, that is my name," responded Bill.

"My boss heard yeh wuz comin' this way," said the cowboy, "an' sent me t' invite yeh oveh t' his ranch; he wants t' see yeh on particular business."

"Who is your boss?" inquired Bill.

"Barnard Raymes," answered the cowboy; "the ranch is right oveh thar beyond that hill."

"What is his business with me?" asked Bill.

"I kaint tell yeh that," answered the cowboy, "but he said hit wuz important."

"All right; I will accompany you to the ranch, and ascertain what important business he may have with me," said Bill.

When the ranch was reached, the two men, leaving their horses at the gate, walked up to the house, where, seated on the porch, were a number of ranchmen and cowboys,—grim, determined-looking men, capable of enforcing whatever demands they might make, and Bill intuitively realized that he had been conducted to a meeting of the Regulators. Conscious of no wrong-doing, it did not dawn upon him that he was the victim to be tried by this self-constituted court. Having never been present at one of these trials, he felt very much chagrined at the prospect of being present and tacitly sanctioning such proceedings, for the reason that he had great respect for the law as he was accustomed to seeing it administered, where there were legally constituted courts for that purpose, and hence was not favorably impressed with seeing justice enforced in this manner. As they came up, Bill cast his eyes over the crowd, looking for Barnard Raymez. The latter was seated at the farther end of the porch, but did not deign to notice him. As they advanced up the steps, a small, weasen-faced old man, with gray beard and ferret-like eyes, came forward to meet them.

"Capt'n, heah is yehr man," said the cowboy, pointing directly at Bill.

"So yehr the hawse-thief, hey?" said the Captain in a squeaking voice.

Bill's face flushed crimson at the accusation, and in a tone of suppressed anger he replied: "Old man, I am not accustomed to being addressed in this manner, and if you were younger, I would answer you in a manner that you might regret."

"Bold words, young'un, bold words; but don't try t' rile me, fur I'm the man who has the pleasure uv passin' the death sentence on all uv yeh hawse-thieves that air ketched in this heah paht uv the country," said the Captain.

"And I tell you that I will pass sentence of death on any man who connects my name with the word 'thief,' " replied Bill.

"Hold! hold!" commanded a stern voice, as a tall man, with a piercing eye and a firm jaw, arose from the bench on which he had been sitting, a silent spectator of this little drama. "Let us get down to business and make this investigation in a fair, square manner.

"Mr. Parker, we are, as I think you already infer, a council of Regulators, assembled because it has been reported to us that certain charges of stealing have been made against you. Now we want to be perfectly fair in this matter, and will hear all the testimony from both sides, and from this evidence we will determine whether you are innocent or guilty."

"I cannot understand why such charges are made against me," said Bill, "but I am perfectly willing to have this investigation proceed, now that it has been started, and am sure that I can convince you gentlemen that such charges are absolutely false."

"Barnard Raymes will now tell his story," said the Captain.

Taking his seat near the Captain, in a clear and distinct tone of voice Raymes began his testimony.

"Bill Parker is a stranger here," said Raymes; "no one here knows anything about him. I have heard several times that he was not square, and have had my eyes on him for several months past, without finding anything positively certain against him. About two weeks ago I missed some of my ponies, and felt sure they had been stolen. I got on their trail, and, with my personal servant Pete, followed them down into the Cross-Timbers, where we were joined by Jack Baxter, and we finally overtook the thieves with the ponies. The three men in charge of them immediately fled, but one of them was so near us that we all three recognized him as Bill Parker. We exchanged several shots with him, but he escaped, and this is the first time I have had the pleasure of seeing him since that day. I accidentally learned that he would be down in this neighborhood to-day, and knowing that I could find some means of inducing him to call upon us, I invited you to be present and participate in the deliberations, which I am sure can result in but one way, and that will be his conviction and execution."

Pete was next called. With his old sombrero swinging loosely in his right hand and the left one industriously picking at his lips, he ambled up to the witness-chair and took his seat. Pete was a Mexican, dull, stupid and ignorant, and was ill at ease in his position as a witness.

Raymes assumed the rôle of counsel for the prosecution, and in a peremptory manner began to examine the witness.

"Pete, do you know that some of my horses were stolen about two weeks ago?"

"Si, Señor."

"You went with me to follow their trail?"

"Si, Señor."

"You know that we overtook them and the thieves down in the Cross-Timbers?"

"Si, Señor."

"You know that Bill Parker was one of the men with the stolen horses?"

"Si, Señor."

"Call the next witness," said Raymes.

"Let me ask the witness a question," said Bill.

"Hit are agin the rules fur criminals t' ask questions an' botheh the witness," said the Captain.

"Go ahead and ask him all the questions you desire," said the ranchman who had assured Bill a fair trial.

"Pete, are you acquainted with me?" asked Bill.

"No, Señor."

"Is this the first time you have ever seen me?"

"Si, Señor."

"That is all," said Bill.

Jack Baxter was called, and came forward, looking casually over the Regulators, until his eyes rested upon the defendant, when with a smile and a bow of recognition he took his seat. Bill was astonished at the assurance and impudence of the man, whom he immediately recognised as the gambler he had met in Gainesville and forced to leave the town because of dishonest and crooked work in a game of cards. The fact now became clear that there was a deep-laid plot to convict him, and he was forced to the conclusion that some one was seeking his life. He had been astonished beyond measure at the testimony already introduced, and could only explain it as a case of mistaken identity; but when he recognised Jack Baxter he realised that this man had been brought there for the purpose of convicting him on false and manufactured testimony. It was now too late for him to recede from his promise to submit his case to the men before whom he was arraigned, and without interruption or question he permitted Baxter to proceed with his testimony.

"I was riding up toward this ranch about two weeks ago," said Baxter, "when I met Col. Raymes, who is a friend of mine, with his boy Pete, riding rapidly toward the east. Upon inquiry, I learned that they were on the trail of some stolen horses, and I turned back with them. We traveled for some considerable distance, and finally overtook the thieves in the open woods. There were three of them, and we pushed them so closely that they abandoned the stolen horses and sought safety in flight. A great many shots were fired by both parties, but luckily no one of our party was hurt. In the running fight I got quite close to one of the thieves, and recognised him as Bill Parker. I am quite well acquainted with him, having often met him at gambling-houses, where we have sat in the same games. Colonel Raymez also recognized him, and we spoke of the matter at the time, and made a special effort to capture him, but he escaped. I am sorry to testify against a man with whom I have sat in many a social game, but in the interest of justice and fair dealing, I am compelled to do so."

"Bill Parker kin now tell his little story," announced the Captain in a triumphant tone.

Parker arose from the bench on which he had been sitting, gazed calmly and fearlessly at the sullen and determined faces before him, and saw at a glance that the strong and powerful testimony introduced had convinced the Regulators that he was guilty. He realised how difficult it would be to stem the current of opinion already formed against him, and if convicted, he fully understood the extent of the penalty that would certainly follow.

"Gentlemen," said he, "it is true that I am comparatively a stranger in this part of the country, but up at the Three-Bar ranch I have been well and I think favorably known for the past two years. I came to this country to live with you and be one of you, because I liked the free and unfettered life of a cowboy. On my arrival in your State I obtained employment at the Three-Bar ranch, where I have been continuously since that time, with the exception of a short trip to the Wichita Mountains and a drive to Abilene, Kansas. Two weeks ago, at the time these horses are alleged to have been stolen, I was up on the Trinity river, gathering up cattle, more than one hundred and fifty miles from this place. The foreman and more than twenty cowboys of my ranch will testify to this fact. This story of Barnard Raymes is false from first to last. It has been concocted for the purpose of having me condemned upon false testimony, for some reason to me unknown; for I have never, by word or act, done him the slightest injury. The Mexican boy who testifies is, as can be readily seen, completely under the control of Raymes, yet his testimony shows that he had been instructed to swear falsely in this case. I have met the last witness once, only, and I will now relate to you the facts of that meeting, and you can then judge whether or not it was a social meeting. Some of my friends were engaged in a poker game down in Gainesville about two years ago, and while watching the game I saw this man stealing cards. I immediately bought some chips and engaged in the game, for the purpose of preventing him from robbing my friends, and at the proper time I called him down, and forced him at the muzzle of my revolver to refund the stolen money and to leave town. This is the secret of his enmity toward me, but from that day I have not met him until he appeared here to testify against me in this matter.

"I would scorn to ask you for clemency or to appeal for sympathy, but I do demand justice. I want the opportunity to prove to your entire satisfaction that Raymes and Baxter are perjured villains, and that I am an innocent man. You have assembled here for the purpose of doing exact justice, and I cannot believe that you want to convict me in this matter unless you are convinced, beyond a reasonable doubt, that I am guilty. It will be but a slight inconvenience to you to grant me time to send for the witnesses, whom I know you will have to believe, which will certainly convince you that this is a false charge. I promise that by to-morrow noon I will have them here, in such numbers and of such high character and standing that you will without hesitation declare that I am innocent. Nothing but a declaration from you to that effect will satisfy me, for I have always held my honor sacred and dearer to me than life, and for that reason I am exceedingly anxious that there should be the most thorough investigation in this matter."

When Bill took his seat there was a moment of complete silence, for some of the Regulators were half inclined to believe him.

The silence was broken, however, by the squeaking voice of the Captain, who said:

"Young'un, yehr story is mighty thin; all the hawse-thieves brought befoah us hev 'bout the same one t' tell, but we don't believe 'em none, fur hit's agin nater t' believe that a man will tell on hisself when he knows that he'll git shot fur hit; but the poweh uv the law must be uphel' an' yeh've only a little time t' think on hit. Barnard Raymes air a well-known citizen, an' his word will go furder than the words uv forty hawse-thieves, an' besides, he's backed up by two otheh men. Hit are true, Pete air nothin' but a Greaser, an' might lie some, but Baxter stan's well with Colonel Raymes, an' must be all right. As fur waitin' fur yeh t' sen' fur yehr friends, that won't go down with us. The trial are oveh an' yeh'll hev t' take yehr medicine, but we'll fust hev the boys t' vote yeh guilty. Them that believes this heah chap guilty will say yes."

"Yes!" came from a chorus of voices, and Bill was convicted.

"Hit air now the duty of the coaht t' pernounce the sentence," said the Captain. "Bill Parker, yeh hev become infamous by reason uv yeh'r crimes, an' as good an' law-abidin' people we must inflict the penalty. Fur this reason I hev the pleasure uv informin' yeh, that at five o'clock this evenin' yeh'll be shot, an' 'bout the best thing yeh kin do 'twixt now an' then is t' pray."

. . . .

On the day that Bill received sentence at the hands of the Regulators, Circle-Dot was galloping over the prairie, taking her daily exercise, when she was startled by the actions of a man on foot who was running toward her, waving his arms frantically and shouting to attract her attention. As he came nearer, she saw that it was Joe Dingby; she reined in her horse and waited for him to approach; he came on at full speed and reached her utterly exhausted, and for a few moments unable to speak a word.

"Why, Joe, what is the matter with you?" asked Circle-Dot.

"Oveh t' the Raymes ranch, the Regulators are havin' a trial," he gasped.

"Well, I don't care to hear about those matters," said she.

"But they are goin' t' convict a innercent man," insisted Joe.

"I hope they will not do that," said Circle-Dot.

"Hit are Bill Parker they are tryin'," said Joe.

Waiting to hear no more, Circle-Dot turned her pony toward the Raymes ranch, and giving her horse a free rein and using the riding-whip vigorously, she dashed toward the ranch at the best speed of which her pony was capable. Circle-Dot intuitively felt that this was a scheme of Barnard Raymes to make way with Bill Parker, as he had threatened to do. When she came in sight of the old ranch buildings, she looked eagerly for some signs of activity, but everything seemed perfectly tranquil, and seeing a number of men seated on the porch she dismounted and walked up to where they were assembled. The sentence of death had just been pronounced by the Captain, and Bill was standing with his revolver in his hand, bold and defiant, waiting for the attack which he knew would soon come. His foes were so numerous that he knew he must be overwhelmed by numbers and subdued or probably killed where he stood. He was too proud to parley or ask for respite, but he was determined that some of them should fall before he yielded.

As Circle-Dot reached the porch, Raymes went forward to meet her.

"Miss Circle-Dot, I am happy that you have so honored my ranch as to call here," said he.

Without replying to his salutation, Circle-Dot waved him aside, and walking upon the porch, inquired the cause of the meeting.

"We are met to uphol' the law by punishin' the guilty," said the Captain, "an' thar," pointing toward Bill, "is the hawse-thief we're goin' t' shoot this evenin'."

Circle-Dot looked around over the grim lot of Regulators, to many of whom she was well known, and asked:

"Is what this man says true? Are you going to murder Mr. Parker?"

The men protested and declared that what they intended to do was perfectly legitimate and right, and then told her of the evidence on which he had been convicted.

Circle-Dot's face flushed with anger and her breast was filled with emotion and indignation.

"It is false!" she cried, "a base, treacherous lie, told by Barnard Raymes with murder in his heart—the infamous coward. Men, you have been basely deceived in this matter, for the evidence you have heard has been from the lips of perjured villains, cowards who dare not meet in open combat the man whom they seek to murder, but have resorted to this cowardly method so that you might be made participants in this crime, hoping thereby to accomplish their foul plot and escape the penalty.

"Barnard Raymes desires the death of Bill Parker because he believes him to be his rival for the affections of a girl whom he professes to love. I will tell you the whole story, and then you can judge whether or not this is an attempt by Raymes to get rid of one whom he dare not openly attack."

Circle-Dot then related to them the fact that Raymes had sought to have her marry him, and that she had refused the honor, and that he had then threatened to effectually dispose of Bill Parker, whom he believed to be his rival. She also told them of Bill's gallant conduct in rescuing her from the Indians, and assured them that she knew personally that this was a false accusation; that she was determined that he must be immediately discharged, and that if any punishment was inflicted it should be on the perpetrators of this conspiracy.

Before she had finished her last sentence, the tall, determined-looking ranchman before alluded to arose and addressing his fellow Regulators said: "Boys, I believe the girl is right, and that Bill Parker ought to be discharged; and I, for one, will make further investigation, and if I find that we have been imposed upon in this matter, some one will have to suffer for it. I move that we now reconsider this matter, and that Bill Parker be declared innocent."

"Hit ain't regular," said the Captain; "hit air clearly agin the rules."

"Put the motion," said the tall man in a commanding voice.

"Them that wants t' discharge Bill Parker, kin say yes."

"Yes!" came back from all present excepting Baxter, Raymes, and the Captain.

"Bill Parker, yeh hev been legally convicted," said the Captain, "an' by all the rules uv the order yeh ought t' be shot, but the matter hev been reconsidered, an' yeh hev been voted free. Hit now becomes my duty t' announce t' yeh that yehr discharged, and may the Lawd hev mercy on yehr pore soul."

"Gentlemen," said Bill, "I thank you, and I hope I may sometime demonstrate to each of you that your decision is right."

"Barnard Raymes and Jack Baxter," he said, addressing them, "you have each sought to take my life by this cowardly attack. I now give you fair notice that when we meet again you will be given a fair chance and then forced to fight for your life. I will not seek you, but when we meet only one of us will leave the place without assistance."

"I will gladly accept the chance, and hope our meeting may be soon," said Baxter.

Raymes turned, walked into the house, and closed the door without uttering a word.

The Regulators each gave Bill their hand in token of friendship, and the meeting was at an end.

CHAPTER XLII.

BILL MAKES A DECISION.

Returning from the trial by the Regulators, Bill accompanied Circle-Dot, and was exceedingly anxious to express to her his thanks and gratitude for her heroic efforts in his behalf, but the words refused to come at his bidding; his mind seemed in such a tumult of conflicting emotions that words, phrases and sentences were mingled in his mind in a conglomerate mass of unintelligible matter. In fact, Bill had lost his tongue; the motive power that is behind every intelligent conversation refused to act, and there was but one thing that he could do, and that was to be silent. How long this inertia of speech and thought may have lasted is uncertain, had he not been rudely brought back to the free use of his natural faculties by an accident. They were riding along over the open prairie, without a path or road to guide them, when the pony ridden by Circle-Dot stepped into a gopher-hole, and fell forward, throwing the rider to the ground. The horse soon regained its feet, none the worse for the fall, but Circle-Dot was not so fortunate; she attempted to arise, but found that she had sustained either a fracture or a severe sprain of her ankle. Bill leaped from his horse and ran to her assistance, attempting to raise her to her feet.

"Let me sit on the grass," said Circle-Dot. "I fear that I have sprained my ankle so badly that I cannot stand."

Bill assisted her to a seat on the grass, and meekly stood by and asked, "Is there anything I can do to relieve you?"

"No, I think not," said Circle-Dot; "unless you bring my pony and help me to mount. I think I could ride home if I were safely on Jack's back."

Bill led the pony up to where she was sitting, and then for one brief moment held Circle-Dot in his arms while he lifted her to the saddle. They resumed the journey, and Bill was no longer tongue-tied, but talked glibly about the accident and the probability of its proving serious. In fact, he talked about everything except what he wanted to say, and that was to tell this girl of his love. When they arrived at her home, Circle-Dot was made as comfortable as possible, and given into the custody of her mother and May Dyer; and Bill, having no longer an excuse for remaining, returned to his own ranch.

In relating the details of his trial by the Regulators to the boys at the ranch, Bill gave all the credit to Circle-Dot for having effected his release and thereby saved his life; and he was emphatic in the declaration that only she could have saved him from the Regulators, who had already condemned him.

Bill had never experienced any entangling love affairs, and his emotions at this time were something he was totally unable to fathom. He had taken pride in the theory that he was equal to any emergency, and thus far he had been able to cope with any and all problems of life that were presented to him. He now felt that he was adrift on a boundless ocean, without a rudder or compass to guide him to the shore, and being unable to determine the route he should take, he was content to drift along, hoping that future developments would guide him in the right direction.

He knew that he was hopelessly in love with Circle-Dot, but he also knew that he was poor and she was wealthy. He had serious doubts as to Circle-Dot having formed any regard for him, save as a friend, but he had no doubt but that Circle-Dot's mother would refuse to sanction any proposed alliance between her daughter and himself. He well knew that this proud old Southern lady would think that she was eternally disgraced by having a common cowboy for a son-in-law. He also thought Circle-Dot would hesitate long and seriously before she would marry a man who was not acceptable to her mother. Having convinced himself that his suit would be rejected, he resolved that he would not risk severing his present friendly relation with her by seeking to obtain that which his better judgment told him would be impossible to secure. Having once made up his mind to pursue this course, he felt at least he was no longer drifting, but that he had a mission in life worthy of his best efforts, and that was to do these things which are right and will command the respect of the world, because they are for the betterment of mankind.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A FIGHT TO A FINISH.

Two men were riding over the old Brazos River Trail out upon the broad level plains, one hot sultry day, a short time after the trial by the Regulators. They were going in opposite directions, one toward the north and the other toward the south, and unless one of them should make a detour to the right or to the left, they must meet face to face. The one coming from the south was riding a splendid horse, that moved over the level prairie so smoothly and so swiftly that its rider was not moved in his seat, but seemed to skim along as if borne by some engine running on rubber tires over a smooth surface. The rider had taken off his coat and strapped it to the back of his saddle; his reins were lying loosely on his horse's neck, his hat shoved back from his forehead, and his demeanor was so easy and graceful and the control of his horse so perfect, that it was apparent he was an accomplished horseman and that he had confidence in himself and horse. In his right hand he carried a repeating-rifle, with the breech resting on his foot in the stirrup and the muzzle pointing upward. A glance was sufficient to show that this horseman was Jack Baxter, and it was also evident that he had already recognized the man coming toward him as his hated enemy and deadly foe, Bill Parker. There was a look of intense hatred in his eyes when he saw that it was his antagonist, but not a quiver of the lips nor twitching of the muscles when he realized the impending contest, knowing that it would end only with the death of one of the parties. That he had the courage and the skill to make the combat a desperate one, could not be doubted. That he was anxious to get within reach of his enemy, so that the fight would be speedily terminated, was evident, for his horse was urged forward a little faster and the rider seemed a trifle anxious to get within reach of his intended victim.

Bill Parker, the other horseman, was riding leisurely along without a thought or suspicion of danger. He was armed only with the usual brace of revolvers, and his broncho with a free rein was gently carrying him over the trail. He saw the man approaching, but supposing him to be some ranchman of the neighborhood he continued his way down the path.

Suddenly Baxter checked his horse, raised his repeating-rifle, poised it for a moment in line with his enemy's body, trained his eyes along the sights, and fired. Bill felt a sharp sting in his left side, heard the report of the gun, and as he looked up he saw a curl of blue smoke issuing out of the rifle, which was pointed directly at him. The full truth dawned upon him instantly, and he recognized Baxter as the one who had attacked him. He also realized that he was wounded and was at a great disadvantage, for the long-range repeating-rifle was far superior to his revolver at that distance. Bill felt scorn and contempt for the man who would thus force him to fight without an even chance, and who had tried to get the advantage and murder him by taking the first shot without warning. Bill knew that Baxter had the reputation of being an expert shot, and now that the fight had started he realized that it must be speedily finished. Leaning forward in the saddle, he pressed the rowels of his spurs deep into the broncho's sides, and, resting his head on the mane of his pony, he urged the animal forward at its fastest speed, to quickly bring his adversary within reach of his revolver, which he held in his right hand, while the blue barrel glistened in the sunlight as it rested upon the pony's head just between its ears. Baxter fired again, but without effect, and a third shot from his rifle plowed a furrow along the side of the broncho; but Baxter had lost his skill or his nerve, for either of the shots should have disabled Bill. The distance between them was rapidly closing up, and before Baxter could fire the fourth shot the cowboy's revolver rang out clear and distinct, and then one more shot and the gambler dropped his gun, reeled in his saddle and fell from his horse, dead.

CHAPTER XLIV.

INDIAN TERRITORY DESPERADOES.

Bart Pope was a Creek Indian, who had some considerable negro blood in his veins. He first gained notoriety as an outlaw by murdering an old man who was traveling alone in a wagon from Fort Gibson, going to Texas. Just before arriving at Trotter's Ford on Red river, the old man had camped one night, and was found the next morning with a bullet-hole through his head, and the team and wagon gone. A few days later Pope drove the outfit into Fort Gibson and sold it, and then disappeared. About six months later, with two companions he held up a surveying party who were locating the boundary-lines between some of the Indian tribes, and robbed them of all they possessed, and they were forced to walk one hundred and twenty miles before they could get assistance or report the matter to the Government. From this time Pope was rated as one of the "bad men" of the Nation, and became the leader of a noted band of outlaws. A large reward was offered for his capture, and many futile attempts were made to get him, but every time the detectives and marshals attempted to arrest him they would have a desperate encounter, which always resulted favorably for the outlaw, and he continued to pillage and rob until his name inspired terror throughout the Nation, and business was practically suspended in the country where he was known to operate.

Finally a deputy United States Marshal was assigned to that part of the country, and he determined if possible to exterminate this band of thieves. He secured a warrant for the arrest of Bart Pope, and after getting information which he thought would lead him to the man he was hunting, he procured one of the best horses in the country, and, armed with repeating-rifle and revolvers, proceeded to the place where he had located his man. The officer used the greatest caution, for he realized that many of the inhabitants were friendly to Pope and would warn him if possible. While riding through a dense forest late one afternoon, he saw an Indian coming toward him, and as he approached nearer discovered that the Indian was wrapped in a blanket and riding a poor scrawny little pony, without saddle or bridle, and apparently unarmed. The marshal approached with his hand on his Winchester, ready to throw it into position at the least sign of hostility, but no suspicious movements occurred; on the contrary, the Indian rode with head down and seemed disposed to pass the white man without speaking. Thinking that he might obtain some useful information from this Indian, the marshal hailed him as he was about to pass.

"Do you live near here?" he inquired.

"Yes," from the Indian.

"Know all the people about here?" inquired the officer.

An affirmative nod from the Indian was the only answer he received to this question.

"Heard of any stealing or robbing about here lately?" asked the marshal.

"No," with a negative shake of the head from the Indian.

"Have you ever heard of Bart Pope?" asked the marshal.

"Yes!" and to his surprise the marshal found himself looking into the muzzle of a 44-caliber Winchester which the Indian had adroitly pulled from under his blanket. "Yes, I am Bart Pope, and you are a Government officer sent here to arrest me. Is that right?"

"Yes," replied the marshal, "but as you have the drop on me I guess I had better postpone the matter."

"You have a warrant for my arrest?"

"Yes."

"Well, produce it, and be mighty careful what you do with your hands, for I won't stand any foolishness."

The warrant was produced, and the marshal was next ordered to roll it up carefully and stick it in the muzzle of the outlaw's gun, which was done.

"Now dismount and put your belt and guns on the ground," commanded the outlaw.

When this was done, he continued:

"Now I will exchange horses with you, and you take my advice and get out of this country as fast as you can go, for if any of my friends hear of you being here they might think it a good opportunity to dispose of you."

The marshal rode back to Fort Smith on the scrawny Indian pony, obtained work in a different part of the country, and the efforts of the Government to capture the outlaw and his band temporarily ceased.

This band of outlaws headed by Bart Pope began operations along the Texas border, raiding along the Red river quite extensively. They would make a raid into Texas, steal a number of valuable horses, and recross the river into the Territory, where pursuit was usually of no avail. On several occasions they were followed by the stockmen and pursued so closely that a fight ensued, but the ranchmen invariably got the worst of the conflict and the thieves escaped unharmed. The people along the Texas line became so exasperated that they asked assistance from the Texas Government in protecting their lives and property, and for a time a body of Texas Rangers was stationed along the river to assist the settlers; but when several months had passed and no further raids were made, the Rangers were withdrawn, and immediately the depredations were renewed. The people in that country suffered from the raids of these desperadoes quite as much as from the raids of the Comanches, which were of such frequent occurrence.

CHAPTER XLV.

"A LIFE FOR A LIFE."

It was pay-day at the ranch, and after receiving his wages, Jim had gone to the grocery store where liquors were served and had imbibed pretty freely of the particular brand sold at that place. He was feeling hilarious and full of joy as he started home in the evening. Riding along the road that wound in and through a little grove of timber and brush, he began to chant a cowboy ditty, and although there was a dearth of music in the notes, there was an abundance of noise, and the small birds and other denizens of the forest were frightened at his approach and hastily disappeared.

Upon reaching about the center of the forest he discovered in the path the body of a man; supposing it to be some cowboy that had drank too much liquor and lain down to sleep, he approached nearer and dismounted. A glance at the features of the prostrate man disclosed to Jim his identity. It was Barnard Raymes, lying in a pool of blood, his body still warm, but life extinct. After a hasty examination, Jim rode rapidly to the ranch and reported the matter.

Bill Parker had just returned to the ranch, coming down the same road that Jim had traveled. He had not dismounted, and when Jim reported the discovery he had made, Bill and several other men rode rapidly to the place. Upon investigation it was apparent to them that Raymes had been shot from ambush, and a more careful inspection revealed to them the place from which the shot had been fired. The assassin had concealed himself behind an old stump near the trail and waited for his victim to approach. The shot, fired from but a short distance, struck the deceased in the back below the left shoulder, and he had evidently fallen dead, without a struggle. A large sum of money was found in the dead man's pocket, indicating that robbery was not the motive for the crime. When news of the murder spread through the country it created the most intense excitement, and all agreed that the guilty one must be found and speedily punished.

The next day after the murder a group of men at the grocery store were discussing the matter, when some one suggested that Bill Parker probably knew something about the death of Raymes.

"Why do you say Parker ought to know something about it?" asked one of them.

"I heerd that he come up the road from that place jest befoah Raymes wus found," said the first speaker, "an' I wus tole that when he heerd hit he wus excited like, an' turned white as a sheet. I 'spose yeh hev heerd that Parker threatened t' kill him the fust time they met, an' fur that reason the folks up our way thinks he knows more uv the affair than otheh people."

Jim happened to be standing near and heard the accusation against his friend, and, in his impulsive way, he pushed through the crowd that had gathered and walking up to the stranger who had been speaking, he retorted in an angry voice:

"I'm the feller that found Raymes dead, an' I wuz the one that tole Bill Parker uv hit, an' I want t' tell yeh that any man as says that Bill Parker done that cowardly piece uv work, are a liar."

"Nobody said he done hit," replied the other; "I wuz jest sayin' what wuz the talk up our way."

"I hev knowed a heap uv durned fools that talked too much," said Jim.

"Well, yeh must admit thar is somethin' 'bout hit that oughter be explained," said one of the settlers.

"I'm standin' by what I said at fust," said Jim, "an' I'm ready t' back hit up."

No one seemed inclined to dispute the matter further with Jim, and he returned to the ranch in high indignation and reported to Bill the talk that was being circulated.

"I can see where they get their foundation for such talk," said Bill, "and I cannot explain matters to you at present, but some day when I am at liberty to do so I will explain to you all I know about this unpleasant affair."

Jim was sorely disappointed; he knew Bill could never be guilty of this crime, and he felt that he ought to suppress such outrageous talk, even if it had to be done with a pistol. Bill thanked Jim for his good intentions toward him, and turned away, absorbed in his own meditations, and realising the importance to himself of having the matter fully explained.

A week passed, and still no clue to the perpetrator of the crime had been discovered; but the air was full of subdued suspicions, vague rumors and innuendoes and in some places open declarations that Bill must be the guilty man. Still he remained silent, and apparently careless of his reputation, not exhibiting the slightest anger or resentment when word was brought of these accusations. All that could be drawn from him was, that he would be ready at the proper time to disclose all he knew about the matter, and to fully explain his whereabout at the time the murder was committed. Sandy saw the trend of public opinion, and knew that the tension was so great that it was likely to cause a tragedy at any time; he therefore approached Bill and began a conversation with him in regard to the matter.

"Bill," said he, "yehr actin' powe'ful strange about this heah matter uv killin' Raymes. I know yeh neveh done hit, but hit looks t' me like yeh wus tryin' t' save somebody that did. Uv coase me 'n' Jim an' the boys heah at the ranch don't believe yeh done hit, fur we know yeh too well t' think that yeh would sneak up behin' a feller an' kill him that-a-way; but outside uv us, I don't reckon thar air many people in Texas but what think yeh hed some han' in hit."

"Sandy," said Bill, "I am grateful for your confidence, and I am sorry if people believe the stories that are being circulated, but whatever happens I will not be forced to speak before the proper time comes for me to speak."

"Hit looks t' me powe'ful like the proper time had arriv' when the whole country is gittin' red hot about hit," answered Sandy.

"I can tell you nothing more at present," responded Bill.

"All right; me an' Jim are with yeh," said Sandy, "but I reckon we'll hev t' whip the whole State uv Texas in a few days ef this thing hain't cleared up." And Sandy walked away, perplexed and troubled.

News of the death of Raymes had reached the Circle-Dot ranch, as had also the stories relating to Bill Parker. Day after day Circle-Dot waited, vainly, for news completely exonerating him from such foul suspicions, but the stories continued to increase in number, and from Bill himself came no word of explanation. She retained unlimited confidence in Bill's honor and integrity, but why did he allow these stories to be circulated and make no attempt to deny them? If the two men had met in open combat and Raymes had fallen, she would have said that he received what he richly deserved and no censure would have attached to Bill. The imaginary line of right and wrong was clearly drawn, and universally recognized. The shooting of a man from ambush was, if possible, a greater crime than it would have been in places where the code of honor was less strictly observed. His silence was all the more perplexing to her, for she knew that there were few, if any, who would not believe him and give full credence to his statement; but as the days passed, and he remained silent while the ugly rumors spread, she could stand it no longer, and determined to seek a personal interview with him. She accordingly sought him, and pressed him for an explanation.

"Do you think Raymes was murdered from ambush?" she asked.

"Yes, I think so," answered Bill.

"Is it true that you came up the road a short time before he was found?" she continued.

"That is true," he answered.

"You have not explained to anyone all you know of this matter?" she added.

"No," he returned.

"Will you not tell me what you know of his death?" asked Circle-Dot.

"I would gladly do so if it were possible, but at present I cannot," answered Bill.

"Do you realize that many people are openly accusing you of this atrocious crime?" she asked.

"I have been told that such was the case, but I hoped that you would not believe this idle gossip," he answered eagerly.

"I do not believe it," answered Circle-Dot; "but it is not idle gossip, as you suppose: it is the honest conviction of many reputable people, for the unknown facts which you refuse to disclose appeal to them as proofs of your guilt. As for me, my spirit is too proud for me to submit to such accusations or consent to sit idly by and hear my friends accused of such crimes, for you must know that in Texas such things are a disgrace."

"Miss Circle-Dot," answered Bill in subdued tones, "I, too, am proud, and above all things else I value your good opinion of me. I appreciate the motives which prompted you to speak with me on this subject; but though you think me misguided, though I lose your good opinion—yes! even though I should lose my life, I again assure you that I can tell you nothing at present, and I must not go contrary to my conviction of right and justice in this case."

Circle-Dot was puzzled. She could see no clear solution of this problem, but it was plain to her that her mission was fruitless, and, reaching to him her gloved hand, she said in a sorrowful tone, "Good-by."

Bill took the proffered hand, and, considering this a final farewell, he uttered one "God bless you, Circle-

Dot!" and she was gone, leaving Bill dazed and sorrowful, but still firm in his resolve.

When Bill rode to the store next day he noticed a larger crowd than usual standing about, and apparently slightly excited. Bill walked among them, noting the scowling faces and suspicious glances directed toward him, but he evinced not the slightest interest. He knew they were worked up to a fever pitch, and that he would soon be called upon to tell of his whereabouts on the evening of the murder, and to explain what he knew concerning that affair. He presently saw a group of several men detach themselves from the crowd and start toward him.

"Bill Parker, you are arrested for the murder of Barnard Raymes," said the leader of the party.

"All right, gentlemen," said Bill; "here are my revolvers; I am ready to accompany you."

"An' heah are my revolvers," said Sandy, approaching the crowd and covering them with a six-shooter in each hand. "Bill Parker are my friend; he hain't guilty uv this heah crime, an' I'll shoot the head off uv the fust galoot that chips in t' this game."

"An' I'm standin' by Sandy," said Jim, "an' yeh kin bet yehr life thar will be a consider'ble number uv funerals aroun' heah to-morrer ef yeh fellers begin anything;" and after delivering the foregone ultimatum, Jim ranged himself alongside of Sandy and prepared for the trouble.

"No! no!" exclaimed Bill; "Sandy, you and Jim most not interfere in this matter. Everything will be explained in due time, and there will be no cause for trouble."

At this moment the crowd parted, to admit a man who had been forcing his way to where Bill was standing, and, worn and haggard-looking, Joe Dingby stood before them.

"Fellers," began Joe, "I hev allus said that 'A life fur a life' wus my religion. I am the only man as kin tell yeh all about the death uv Barnard Raymes. I seed him at the store that day, an' I knowed that he'd go home purty soon; so I jest went down the road t' the ole stump, an' when he come 'long I laid my rifle on the stump an' popped him befoah he knowed I wus thar. 'A life fur a life' is my religion. Did I give him a chance? No! Did he give pore Tige a chance? Didn't he jest shoot the pore dawg fur nothin'? What show did the dawg hev when he up an' shot hit fur no fault uv his'n, but jest 'cause he's mad? Did I give him a chance? Yes; I give him the same chance he give Tige. I killed him, an' I'm ready t' die fur hit any time yeh git ready t' shoot me. 'A life fur a life' is my religion. Afteh he fell I started down the road, an' I saw Bill Parker ridin' along slow-like to'ard the ranch, him a-havin' jest come up from the creek. He asked what I'd been shootin', an' I said hit must 'a' been some otheh feller, 'cause I hadn't shot anything. Then I tole him I'd hed some trouble, an' I axed him as a favor not t' tell anybody that he'd seen me in that neighborhood 'til afteh ten days, an' then I said I'd tell him all 'bout hit. I begged him so hard that he promised, not thinkin' that I'd killed anybody, uv cosse. I tole him not t' say anything, fur I wus goin' t' do somethin' t' help Peggy an' so he promised not t' say nothin' 'bout hit. I guess he wus consider'ble surprised when he foun' I made him promise t' keep this killin' a secret. But when he foun' I'd killed Raymes, instead uv tellin' evehbody, like most people would 'a' done, he let eveh onery cuss in the country think he hed killed Raymes hisself,—all owin' t' that promise.

"Well, I went down in t' the Cross-Timbers an' fixed up the title t' some lan' so Peggy won't hev such a hard time, an' now I've come back t' take my medicine.

"Bill, give me yehr han'. I want t' shake with yeh jest once, fur yehr white all the way through. Boys, ef yeh don't make a clean job uv hit the fust shot, shoot ag'in quick, fur I don't want t' suffer. All I axes yeh t' remember are that 'A life fur a life' wus my religion."

Every man present knew Joe Dingby, and of the circumstances surrounding the death of his dog. They knew that Joe loved his dog more than anything else, and that Raymes had done a cruel and brutal thing in killing it. They knew that Joe was a harmless old man, and not one of them was willing to be his executioner. One by one they walked away, until but three or four were left.

"Boys, this are not right," said Joe; "'A life fur a life' is my religion, an' I'm willin' t' stan' by hit."

"Well, Joe, you had better go home, and when they want you they will send for you," said Bill.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOGGY.

One time, when the cowboys were temporarily absent from the ranch, thieves made a raid on it and stole five of the best ponies, including Sandy's favorite racing broncho. When the boys returned they found the greatest consternation about the place. Old Dick had seen the party driving off the ponies, and had recognized Bart Pope as the leader of the three men who did the stealing. Fearful that the thieves would make their escape, the boys determined to pursue them instantly, and, mounting their best horses, Bill, Sandy and Jim started after them, riding at a fast gallop. Delayed only a short time at intervals when the trail was lost, they kept up this pace until Red river was reached. Here they found the river had been crossed, and the thieves were in the Indian Nation. Without hesitation they followed across the river, and continued on the trail until they arrived at the timber bordering on the Boggy river. Here they felt sure they would find the outlaws, and it was also certain that then a desperate fight would ensue, for they had sworn to rescue Sandy's pony, however dangerous the undertaking; and this band of desperadoes must also be exterminated, because they had long been a menace to life and property along the border.

The marauders, believing they were now safe from pursuit, had stopped to rest and prepare their dinner. They tied their horses to a long, swinging grapevine about ten yards from the river, and started a fire on the banks of the stream. When the cowboys arrived at the timber they discovered smoke curling up above the tops of the trees, and knew they had located their men. They dismounted, and cautiously approached the raiders, who were concealed by a thick clump of bushes, and they succeeded in reaching a point about two hundred yards distant before the outlaws were discovered. They were busily engaged in preparing their meal, having no sentinel to watch for pursuing foes. They undoubtedly felt secure in this stronghold, and were giving no thought to the possibility of being attacked at this place. The cowboys hastily discussed their plans. Knowing that the river was not fordable at that point, they determined to so surround the thieves that they would be forced to surrender or to fight until one side or the other were all slain.

Bill deployed to the left and Sandy to the right, leaving Jim to hold the center. The two cowboys had been gone but a few seconds, when Jim, in attempting to get to a tree a little nearer the robbers, stepped upon a dry stick, which cracked under his feet, making a distinct noise that was heard by the outlaws. They quickly sprang to their feet and made a rush toward Jim, who boldly stepped out from behind the tree and fired. Fearing that others were in concealment with him, they turned and fled toward the river, intending to get their horses, but Sandy was ready for them there, and two or three rapid shots drove them behind trees, when they began returning the fire. The crack of Bill's rifle from the left and Sandy's from the right, alarmed the outlaws, while in front of them was Jim, and they knew not how many more. The shots coming from three different directions made it impossible for them to entirely screen themselves, but they stubbornly held their positions for about thirty minutes, while the cowboys continued to creep up from tree to tree, drawing the circle closer and closer about the thieves, until it was apparent that they must either make a rush for liberty or be shot down by the cowboys if they remained. At a signal from Pope, the three sprang from their places of concealment and made a rush for their horses, but they were met in front by Jim, who fired, killing the foremost robber. The other two returned the fire, and Jim fell mortally wounded, but in another moment the remaining outlaws were riddled with bullets from the rifles of Bill and Sandy.

The battle on the Boggy is an important factor in the criminal history of the Southwest, and it is conceded by all old frontiersmen to have been the most sanguinary conflict that ever occurred between cowboys and Indian Territory desperadoes.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEATH OF JIM.

The two cowboys now approached the place where Jim was lying in the shade of a tree, with his head resting upon a decayed log. When they were within reach of him, Jim feebly extended a hand to each, and said:

"I'm glad yeh got heah befoah I wus gone, fur the stuff is all off with me. I'm out uv the game, an' have t' cash in my checks. I wus only afeard I would have t' go befoah I could tell yeh boys good-by, but now yeh are here fur me to talk with a little I will be ready purty quick an' ken die kinder easy-like.

"Bill, yeh ken drive a pen purty smooth, an' I want yeh t' sen' some word t' dad an' mam up in Arkansaw. Tell dad that although I died with my boots on, I only fit when I wus in the right, an' that I neveh deserted my frien's in time uv danger. Pore ole dad! when he calls an' feeds the hawgs at night an' when he milks the cows in the mawnin', his heart will all uv the time be sad an' sore 'bout Jim. Tears will come whar smiles use t' be, an' his heart will ache when he tries t' whistle away the trouble. But mam!—dear, lovin' mam, who use t' trun'le me on her knees when I cried an' hug me close t' her bosom when I wus cold ur skeered; dear, kind mam, that allus loved me an' allus took my paht, she feed me when I wus hungry an' she nussed me when I wus sick;—hit'll come nigh breakin' her heaht when she heahs I am dead. Tell her my last thoughts wus uv her an' dad an' home.

"Boys, I'm like a pore ol' maverick that is driv' from hits favorite grazin'-groun's onto a strange range, not knowin' whetheh hit had plenty uv good feed an' watah ur whetheh hit wus a desert; but hit seems like I ken see oveh the way I'm goin' that the grass is green an' the watah is clear an' col', an' I believe the sun will shine by day an' the stahs by night, so the trail will be plain enough fur me t' foller hit t' the end."

"God bless you, Jim! You are the bravest and best boy I have ever known, and I would freely give up my own life to help you at this moment," said Bill. "You are entitled to a good job in any country, and I know your future will be happy, because you will get a square deal over there."

Sandy was also kneeling down by the boy, his heart bleeding with sorrow and sympathy.

"Jim," he said, "maybe the boss uv the ranch oveh thar will know yehr a tenderfoot an' not on t' theah combinations, an' he may give yeh some ol'-timer t' put yeh next t' theah way uv doin' business, like I did with yeh down at our ranch at fust. I know yeh'll ketch on purty easy an' play squar' all uv the time, an' yeh might be foreman uv the outfit some day; an' we'll be comin' oveh that way befoah long, an ef yeh see us in the general roundup yeh ken put us onto the right trail an' help us to savvy the game."

Jim pressed his hand slightly and replied:

"Sandy, yeh'r my side-pardner an' special friend. Yeh taught me how t' do my work right an' how t' be useful. Yeh an' Bill hev allus helped me an' put me next t' the rocky places. Yeh hev both tried t' make life easy fur me, but I kaint thank yeh ernuff fur hit now, fur my voice is gone, but I'll wait an' watch fur yeh an' be ready t' give yeh my rope ur pony ur anything yeh need, when yeh hev finished yehr drive an' lan' oveh on that new range."

Jim was exhausted and fell backward, but was caught by Sandy, who held the boy in his strong arms as a mother would hold her infant child, until the death-struggle had almost passed away, when, with another slight pressure of the hand and a gentle smile, Jim closed his eyes, and without a sign of pain ceased to breathe and was at rest in Sandy's arms.

The bandits were buried where they fell by some cowboys who next day visited the battle-ground, but Jim was tenderly carried on a rude stretcher, prepared for the occasion, to the south bank of Red river in Texas, and there, encased in a rough box, without sheet or shroud, his body was deposited in the grave.

Never did mortal man go down into his grave with two more sincerely sorrowing friends at the sepulcher than did this brave young cowboy.

Bill and Sandy were inconsolable, and feeling that in some vague and mysterious way their presence at the grave the first night might tend to cheer the spirit of their departed comrade, they stayed by the fresh little mound without sleep or rest, until the morning sun was shining through the trees, when, with many tears and sorrowing hearts, they departed. For many long years after his death, when memory recalled to them this tragic incident, they could not refrain from weeping.

A headstone of native "cotton-rock" bearing the following inscription, rudely cut in the soft stone, was subsequently placed at the head of his grave:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
JIM BRUCE,
THE HERO OF THE BATTLE ON THE BOGGY.

This rough little monument, standing in the wood in the river-bottom like a sentinel in the wilderness, guarding the grave of this heroic youth, is probably there yet. Fifteen years since, Bill and Sandy visited the place and shed many tears of sorrow over the neglected grave.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

BILL AND CIRCLE-DOT AGREE.

When Bill Parker met Joe Dingby on that eventful night, and bound himself by a solemn promise not to tell of their meeting for at least ten days, he had not the slightest suspicion that Joe had committed a crime; but when Jim discovered the body of Raymes near the spot where he had heard the shot, the whole situation became perfectly plain to him. He was satisfied that Joe had killed Raymes, and that his promise was for the purpose of screening Joe. This thought distressed him beyond measure, but he considered his promise binding, and would have suffered death rather than have broken it. He did not, however, fully realise or anticipate the disastrous results that would ensue by keeping sacred this unwilling promise, until Circle-Dot visited him and he saw that he was already disgraced in the minds of many people.

After being completely exonerated by Joe Dingby's statement of the facts, his mind was comparatively at ease, except that he still believed Circle-Dot would consider that a certain amount of stigma and disgrace attached to anyone who had been subjected to suspicions, however unmerited. He therefore avoided meeting her, and for a long time made himself miserable as possible by brooding over the matter.

As a last desperate resort, he determined to leave the country and try his fortune in a new locality, where no unpleasant recollections would haunt him and where he would seek to overcome or forget his hopeless love for Circle-Dot. He was firmly convinced that she had intended her last farewell with him to be a final one, but he felt that he could not leave without seeing her once more, and determined that he would ride down to the ranch and acquaint her with his intention of an immediate departure. He accordingly made preparations to leave the ranch, and one evening rode toward Circle-Dot's home.

Circle-Dot was perplexed. She knew that since the death of Raymes, Bill had avoided her, and she was very much surprised, one evening when starting for a canter on her favorite pony, to see the object of her thoughts coming toward her home. When he discovered Circle-Dot he quickly joined her.

"I am exceedingly fortunate in having arrived in time to see you," he began, "for I have come to tell you good-by, and should have been sorry to go without thanking you once more for your many kindnesses and for the many happy hours I have spent in your company."

"I did not know you were going away," answered

Circle-Dot, in surprise; "you have never mentioned it to me before."

"I made up my mind to go but recently," answered Bill. "I start to South America to-morrow."

"Why are you going away?" she questioned. "Are you not contented here?"

"I am going away, Circle-Dot, because I have not the strength to stay here longer. I thought, at first, there might be some slight hope for me, but I have long ago abandoned all hopes, and while I realize that I ought not to speak of it, yet you must know that I am leaving because I have been so unfortunate as to merit your displeasure; and knowing this, it matters but little where I go, since I no longer have an object in life."

"I have not said that I was displeased with you," she interrupted.

"No! You have not said so, but the last time I saw you, when you held out your hand to me in token of farewell, there was something in your voice that told me you meant it to be final." And Bill turned his horse toward the trail which led to the ranch.

"It seems to me," added Circle-Dot, "that it is myself who am unfortunate, if my actions have been such as to cause my friends to wish to leave the country in order to avoid me."

"You either do not, or will not understand me," said Bill. "I am going away because your society means more to me than all else in life; because I cannot stand to be near you and not be with you. You know that I love you, Circle-Dot,—you must have seen it from the first, and knowing how hopeless is my desire to make you my wife, you can scarcely blame me for going away."

"You forget, Bill," said Circle-Dot softly, "that you have never asked me to be your wife."

"Circle-Dot," said Bill solemnly, "will you be my wife?"

With a happy little laugh, that was half a sob, she answered, "Yes."

When Bill was preparing to go home that night, after staying until he could offer no excuse for delaying his visit longer, Circle-Dot accompanied him to the gate, and as he mounted his horse and leaned from the saddle, she whispered, "Bill, are you going to South America to-morrow?"

"No," he replied; "but I am coming south every day until you are ready to accompany me to my own home."

CHAPTER XLIX.

SANDY TELLS BILL A SECRET.

During the succeeding three months Bill visited at the Circle-Dot ranch quite often, and, judging by the cordial manner in which he was received by both Circle-Dot and her mother, it was evident that the old lady had concluded to accept Bill as one of the family. The marriage, however, was not to take place for some time.

Often as were Bill's visits to the ranch, he discovered that Sandy never failed to put in his appearance just as frequently, and a casual observation disclosed the fact that May Dyer and Sandy seemed very much interested in each other. One day, on his return from a visit to the ranch, Sandy sought Bill, and they had a confidential talk.

"Bill," began Sandy, "yeh tol' me tother day that yeh wus goin' t' marry Circle-Dot."

"That is our present intention," laughed Bill.

"Well," continued Sandy, "I know all the fine pints uv a hawse ur a steer, an' I reckon that the galoot as would try t' fool me 'bout one uv them critters wouldn't hev much luck; but wimmen air different somewhat.

A whole herd uv 'em, like we seed at the picnic in the Cross-Timbers, looks powe'ful purty, an' yeh naturally feel good to'ards the whole drove. But I hev been tol' that yeh kaint pick out no one uv 'em an' tell whetheh she'll lead ur drive ur work; ur tell whether she'll be gentle an' docile ur whetheh she'll balk an' kick oveh the traces. But Bill, Circle-Dot are the choice uv the herd; she's 'way above the average, an'll walk by yehr side an' assist yeh eveh step uv the way goin' 'cross the range, an' I feel powe'ful happy t' know yeh'r goin' along the same trail. Ef yeh two don't make a successful an' pleasant drive through life, I'll neveh bet on a shoah thing agin.

"Right heah now I'm goin' t' tell yeh a secret uv my own, Bill. Perhaps yeh hev noticed that I've been spendin' lots uv time down thar at the Circle-Dot ranch lately. Well, the cause uv hit are easy t' explain: I'm gittin' soft-hearted an' tender-like to'ard May Dyer, fur she's jest 'bout the neatest an' best little critter that eveh grased on Texas soil, an' she's got the lariat wrapped 'roun' my heaht good an' plenty; an' so we've agreed t' corral together, an' ef agreeable t' yeh an' Circle-Dot, afteh yeh hev been spliced an' turned out uv the pen all right we'll hev the same gospel-slinger tie the rope fur us, an' we'll all staht on the drive togetheh."

To this proposition Bill readily assented, and when they parted there was a mutual understanding between them, and Sandy was greatly elated and perfectly happy.

. . . .

Down in western Texas, where the land is high and dry, with enough moisture each year to produce a good crop of grass but not enough for farming purposes, there are many large cattle ranches. All of them are now under fence, and some of them contain many thousand acres of land, affording pasture for large herds of cattle. One of the largest of these ranches is owned by two partners, who annually ship to Kansas City and to the Eastern market many of the best grades of beef steers. They are well-known, reliable stockmen, and their business and trade are welcome and sought for by all of the large cattle-buyers and packing industries of the United States.

On the west side of this ranch, on the east bank of the Rio Grande, are two large and commodious dwellings used by the owners during a portion of the year, and at that time, two happy and contented families may be seen there. At one of these houses Sandy and May preside, and the other one is occupied by Bill and Circle-Dot.

THE END.